

The spiritual benefit we receive from regularly attending Church is enormous. This is why the Holy Fathers exhort us never to be absent from the divine services. St Maximos the Confessor writes that “every Christian should frequent the holy Church of God and not be absent from the holy gathering that takes place in the Temple. Firstly because inside the Church, are the holy Angels who record the names of those who enter, present them to God and intercede for them. Secondly, because the Grace of the Holy Spirit is always present in the Temple, though in a special way at the time of the holy gathering, and it transforms each of those present (in relation to his receptiveness.) It transfigures him and truly recreates him towards the more divine and guides him to the symbolism of the mysteries being celebrated, even if he himself is not aware of it, if he belongs to the infants in Christ.”

The Temple in which the Divine Liturgy is celebrated is heaven itself. There the angels and the Triune God are present. The faithful who actively participate in the Divine Liturgy is transported from earth to heaven. St John Chrysostom says, “Nothing fills our lives with so much joy as the delight we feel in the Church. The joy of happy people is safeguarded in the Church. The Church is the desire of the embittered, the contentment of the sorrowful, the comfort of the unfortunate, the rest of the weary. For Christ says, *“Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* What is sweeter than this invitation? When the Lord invites you to the Church, He invites you to a feast. He urges you to rest and not to labour, he carries you from hardships to rest, relieving you from the weight of sins.”

The participation of the faithful in the Divine Liturgy and other common prayers of the Church, helps to heal us from passions and to acquire virtues. As St John Chrysostom tells us, “The Temple is a spiritual hospital and those who come here, once they have received the required medicine and placed it on their wounds, must return to their homes.”

Many of today’s Christians, seeing the increase of evil in the world lose hope and think that only a few faithful have remained with the

Lord. Our presence in the Church has the following benefit: it strengthens the brethren in their struggle and unites them to other struggling brethren. St John reminds us that the first Christians spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth, “the reason being that they never abandoned their gatherings, but were always together, passing the day in church with prayers and hearing the word of God. This is why they lit such a great flame, this is why they were never split apart, but drew in the whole world to God.” This is why we are called to imitate the first Christians “and to run to each gathering that takes place in the Temple for the benefit of the Church and for our own benefit. And if some desire is burning you up you will be able to extinguish it easily just by looking at the house of God. If you are being controlled by anger, with ease you will put the beast to sleep. And if again some other passion has besieged you, you will easily be able to stop the tempest and bring calm and much peace inside your soul, which we pray that every one of us will enjoy, with the Grace and love for mankind of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

After Going to Church

The person who has communed of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ “in the fear of God, in faith and in love” leaves the church as a new person. He has received Christ Himself within him. When he leaves the Temple of the Lord he takes the peace of God into the world with him. He becomes a witness of God’s love to his fellow men. St John Chrysostom exhorts us to, “Draw our brethren into the Church, admonish those who are deluded, advise them not only with words, but also with deeds. Teaching by our behaviour, by life, is greater. And even if you say nothing, but leave the divine gathering, showing those who were absent with your appearance, with your countenance, with your voice, with your gait and with your over all modesty, the benefits you took from the Church and went out, that is enough for admonition and advice. For, thus should we leave here, as from a holy sanctuary, as if we have descended from the heavens themselves... Teach all those who do not come to Church that you chanted with the Seraphim, that you belong to a divine state, that you are registered in the choir of angels, that you spoke to the Lord, that you were together with

Christ. If we keep ourselves in check in this way, it won’t be necessary to say anything to those who were absent when we leave here. But from our own benefit they will feel their own loss and will speedily run to the church to enjoy the same benefits. Because, seeing the beauty of your soul, even if they are the most indifferent of all, they will love your own grace.”

St John also tells us how the Divine Liturgy also helps us in the spiritual struggle we continue when we leave the church, “The Holy Blood of the Lord waters our soul giving it great strength. If we receive that Blood worthily, it drives away the demons and keeps them far away from us while drawing near to us the angels and the Lord of the angels... Those who commune of that Holy blood stand together with the Angels, the Archangels and the heavenly powers, they wear the royal garment of Christ and carry spiritual weapons. But I have not yet said the most important. They have been robed in the Kingdom itself.”

Why Don’t You Come to Church?

We have seen, briefly some of the many blessings the faithful obtain when the regularly come to Church and participate in the Holy Mysteries. We have also seen that the Church excommunicates those who willingly separate themselves from her in order to bring them to repentance and return them to the Church. Still there are many people who for various reasons stay away from the Church and deprive themselves of the blessings we receive. Let us take a look at some of these excuses:

Working on a Sunday:

Many claim they cannot come to Church on a Sunday because they need to work to support themselves and their families. St Kosmas Aitolos tells us however, “We must work for six days for these vain, earthly, and false things and on the Lord’s day we stop working and go to church to reflect on our sins, on death, on hell and Paradise. To reflect on our soul which is more honourable than the entire world and not to over-eat and over-drink and commit sins. Neither should we work or do business on Sunday. Whatever profit you make on Sunday is lost and cursed and you bring fire

and curse into your house and not prayer and blessing...”

Just give Me two hours of the feast day, the Lord asks each one of us. “Even better,” says St John Chrysostom. “Don’t give the two hours to Me, but to yourself, so that you will leave the church filled with blessings” In the Divine Liturgy we are transported from earth to heaven and when we leave we take with us, “the promise of the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Work at home and rest:

It is not only our professional business that keeps us away from Church, but also work around the house. Many women say the Sunday is the only day they have to clean the house and make food etc...Especially nowadays when women are working outside the house this excuse does not seem unreasonable. But the truth is that a woman who loves the Church will find time to do these things without being deprived of attending Church.

Men, on the other hand who work all week see Sunday as an opportunity for rest and recreation and therefore don’t go to Church. This is because they have not experienced the true rest and communion with God that the Divine Liturgy gives to those who are weary. They would rather run off to the golf course or the tennis court or go fishing and return home having suffered bodily and often spiritual exertion. Or they spend the day in front of the television, a cause of great spiritual harm. Prayer, on the other hand, would give him peace of soul and rest from his labours.

Mourning:

Mourning is another excuse used by those who do not attend Church, saying that they don’t want people to see them as if the Church was a place of worldly entertainment. In this way the Devil succeeds in distancing us from the Church at one of the times when we and our loved one who has passed away, can benefit most from our presence and prayers in the House of God. This is the time when we should go more frequently to Church for divine consolation and to pray for the rest of the soul of our beloved.

Other excuses:

Aside from those we have already mentioned, there are countless other excuses for why some people won’t come to Church. Some

don’t like the priest, others don’t like the chanters or the choir or the committee. Some claim they don’t have suitable clothes to wear, as if it were a formal function. Some think it is enough just to light a candle and leave again. Others claim that the incense bothers them. Many say they don’t need to go to church in order to worship God. The fact is, however that all these excuses are temptations from the Devil. He is behind every excuse ever made for not coming to Church because nothing terrifies him more than people who attend Church regularly and partake of the Holy Mysteries. St John Chrysostom warns that those who distance themselves from their father’s house, in other words, the Church, easily fall prey to heretics who remove from them the golden jewel of faith and drown them in their filthy teachings.

The Holy Church of Christ calls us, like a loving mother, to participate frequently in all the Mysteries, services and prayers. She reminds us of the dangers of distancing ourselves from the Body of Christ. And if in the end we don’t hear the voice of the Church, the voice of Christ Himself calling us, then the words of Christ apply to us, “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.” (John 15:22) The Church is inviting you to the Lord’s feast in the Kingdom of God. It’s up to you to come and “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 33LLX/34)

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The Spiritual Benefit of Attending Church

