

ASCENSION (A-5) Why did I join this Church?

“General Westmoreland was once reviewing a platoon of paratroopers in Viet Nam. As he went down the line, he asked each one of them a question: “How do you like jumping, son?” “Love it, sir!” said the 1st one. The next: “The greatest experience in my life, sir!” And the 3rd: “I hate it, sir!” “Then why do you do it,” asked Westmoreland. “Because I want to be around guys who love to do it.” There are many reasons why people join a church, but I suspect the main reason is to be around people who love Christ. That’s it for me! (From "Where does the power come from," *Dynamic Preaching*, 1990, pg. 1-2)

Look closely at the Gospel, and you’ll find this phrase: “Some of them doubted.” I don’t know about you, but that consoles me. If Jesus, the greatest human to walk this face of the earth can choose a band of followers, some of whom doubt after living & eating with and listening to Jesus for 3 years, if he could choose such a band of followers, then why do we, who haven’t seen, be expected to doubt less? It makes me want to be around those whom Jesus chose, even if they were full of doubts.

Notice, Jesus did not reprimand them for doubting. He eventually had to trust that they would eventually learn or understand once the Holy Spirit would come at Pentecost. This should console us because I have never known anyone who has NOT doubted at least once in one’s life. We want to be around those who love Christ enough to do what he did in spite of doubts.

There is a testimony of a 1st C. Roman who describes the character of a Christian Community to Hadrian, the Emperor: “They love each other and never fail to help widows or save orphans from those who would harm them. If they have something, they give freely to the one who has nothing; if they see a stranger, they are happy to take one home, as though they were a real brother/sister. They don’t consider themselves brothers in the usual sense, but in God’s Spirit.” Hearing this, don’t you want to be with those who live this out?

I have heard this parish described much in the same way: a Spirit of family in God. But why do you suppose that the early Church and us here are able to do the good that we do and have people feel it? I believe that it is the quality of our prayer. We pray together, play together, and work together. True fellowship is the basis of a Christian community. This was Martin's dream, and that is why I call it the KINDOM not KINGDOM of God.

Jesus wants us to be a witness to our lives as individuals and as a community just like we need others to witness to our lives. Jesus tells us by ascending that our lives will not go unnoticed, because he will be there to notice them, even when we think God isn't noticing.

What do I think Jesus has noticed? The same thing I have noticed: We've witnessed you taking pride in your children singing or playing at Mass. We've noticed how you come together faithfully and sit together as a family. We've noticed how you decorate the inside of your homes with reminders of what God has done for you and what God means to you. We've noticed you feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and imprisoned, the addicted and the depressed; we've noticed you share what you had with those who don't have, and help heal broken relationships.

"Thank you for the memories, for showing me that you've learned from me, who is meek and humble of heart," is what Jesus is saying to us this day. "Thank you for loving as I have loved you. As you break bread in memory of me, so I break bread here in memory of what you have done and are doing." Shalom to you all.