

40 Days of Fitness

A daily devotional by Rev Garry Hardingham

DAY 19 – Does God need the Church?

'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.' John 17:20-23

I will not bore you again with my conversion story except to say it happened at home, away from the church. I used to joke that I became a Christian despite the church, not because of it. But is this true?

Can anyone actually belong to God, at least the Christian God we understand, without the church?

Simple answer....no!

Yesterday, we explored the fact that, like Jesus, the church is real. But, we must remember that the Church is not Jesus. The church is not an extension of the incarnation of God. The church is the creation, by the Holy Spirit, the gift of the call of Christ as his earthly body. The question is "why?"

And the answer lies in how God, through Jesus, chose to interact with His creation. God did not send His Son for a 33 year earthly holiday with a spectacular, albeit brutal end. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead on the first day of the week may well have been the last word that God spoke to the world. There is no need for history to continue, the purpose of creation had been fulfilled; the great Sabbath rest was complete.

The fact that time continues, that history still runs its course after the resurrection means that God wills, from the depths of creation, to receive acknowledgement and praise and thanksgiving in terms of what and who God is and what God has done. God wills that the creation itself, not only God's self, participate in the peace, and the harmony that has now been established between God and God's creation.

So the existence of the church presupposes this mysterious fact. The fact that God does not will to be God alone as the Lord of creation that is simply reconciled to God's self. The mystery of the existence of the church therefore is this ineffably free decision of God not to be God alone, but to be God with and for the creature in reconciled harmony.

So, it's not that God needs the church. But that through God's grace and love, He wills that the church exist so that God's reconciliation is not just something God does for us, but is a work He invites us to be part of. God could just as easily call a couple of million angels to take control of the situation on earth, but instead He invites us to be about something...and not just something....but everything!

PRAYER

Gracious Father,
Your love for us never ends
Your concern for us never falters.
You will is that we might come to know You more
By working in and through Your Son, Jesus
in reconciling the world back to You.
At times it seems hopeless.
We see people falling away from the church
and our buildings falling into disrepair.
But, as you have willed us to be.
So too have you promised never to abandon us.
Make us strong through You,
That all we do may show forth Your glory
In Christ's Holy name.
Amen