

SCRIPTURAL PASSAGES ON THE CHURCH

Matthew 22:2-14

Luke 14:16-24

Acts 2:44-47; 20:28

1 Corinthians 4:17, 14:12

Ephesians 4:11-16; 5:23

Colossians 1:18

1 Peter 2:9, 10

FOR PRAYER AND REFLECTION

- ✧ Read the *Acts of the Apostles* for a first hand glimpse into the life of the early Christian community
- ✧ What is the true nature of the Church? How do the externals express our internal beliefs? How do the externals sometimes overshadow those things which are essential to our faith?
- ✧ What is the Christian challenge? How can we continue the ministry of Christ in this world as individuals or as members of the Christian community?
- ✧ Look at your own life and your parish. Is it dull or boring? Why? What can you do to strengthen or enliven it?

Whether we like to admit it or not, the Church can be dull. For those who define the Church as an “institution” rather than a joyful gathering of God’s People who share their love for God and one another, the Church is indeed dull. Anyone who defines the Liturgy as an endless ritual performance by the priest and choir, with little or no participation on the part of the congregation is bound to think the Church is dull. And those who claim that Christianity has no obvious relationship to everyday life in the “real” world will surely find the Church to be a dull handover of tarnished golden ages.

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JOYFUL
WORSHIP



JOYFUL WORSHIP

APOSTOLIC EXCITEMENT

No one could possibly call the experience of Jesus Christ and His followers dull. You don't have to believe in Him to agree that Jesus Christ is one of the most interesting persons who ever lived. There's nothing dull or gray or tepid about Him, whether one finds Him quelling a riot or healing a cripple or raising a corpse or calming a storm or, for that matter, preaching a sermon. They didn't nod off when Jesus of Nazareth preached and taught.

The early Church, too, could hardly be described as dull. Read the *Acts of the Apostles*. Here was a community throbbing with life—thrilling, energetic, dynamic. It was feared—hated even—but never ignored. The early Christians had their problems, of course, but they were the result of a living, lively, growing community.

WHAT'S GONE WRONG?

The early Church had “favor with all the people” (Acts 2:47). Christians were held in high honor, even by those who dared not join their ranks (Acts 5:13). The Church's image was that of a revolutionary, dynamic body, led by individuals who were described by their opponents as having “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6).

There aren't many places today where the Church is regarded in this way. The New Testament picture contrasts vividly with the academic, nominal, “respectable” and often quaint, old-world religion practiced by many.

But where Christians really take God at His word, really put their faith in Christ, really understand that the Church has something exciting to offer, and really see the life of the Christian community as something to participate in rather than to associate with, something like the picture in Acts emerges.

No, there doesn't have to be anything dull about the Church. The Holy Spirit is the Life-Giver. Jesus Christ came to give to those who received Him life in all its fullness (John 10:10). The Church, as the “Body of Christ,” shares this life and joy through worship, fellowship, discipleship, stewardship, and the loving relationship God shares with us. When God's People take these things seriously and remain open to Christ in the Holy Spirit, the Church's only problems will be enthusiasm, exuberance, and excitement.

WHAT'S THE ANSWER?

We need to reject mere “religion” and accept the Church for what it in fact is, to look beyond the external trappings and go for the heart of the matter, to see our worship and Tradition not as a repository of quaint yet

meaningless rituals, but rather as expressions of the loving, joyful relationship between God and His People. To have icons or incense without the inward experience and reality of Christ's presence in our lives is to have all the dullness, boredom and frustration of a party with no guest.

The Church needn't be dull. The Church isn't, in fact, dull. But discovering the excitement in our faith requires a return to the very essence of the Church as it really is, to a vision of the Church as the very presence of God in our lives. Dullness comes when the Christian challenge is blunted, when “maintaining the status quo” is the main goal, when no one is shocked or upset. But joyfully proclaiming those things that Jesus Christ Himself proclaimed can put an end to a merely formal, external boredom.

No doubt this may be extreme, emotional, and profoundly disturbing for some, but it is, after all, Christ's message! And this can never be dull.