

“...without me you can do... nothing!”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, on July 20, 1969 to be specific, the lunar module Eagle, carrying astronauts Aldrin & Armstrong, landed on the moon.

While Armstrong prepared for his historic moonwalk, Aldrin unpacked bread & wine and put them on the AGS computer—Abort Guidance System. He describes it thus:

“I poured the wine into the chalice.... In the ^{1/6} gravity of the moon, the wine curled slowly & gracefully up the side of the cup. It was interesting to think that the very 1st liquid ever poured on the moon & the very 1st food ever eaten there ...were ...the elements ...of ...communion.”

Just before eating & drinking the elements, Aldrin read this passage from St. John:

“I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, & I in him, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me.”

Commenting on their Communion-like experience alone on the moon, Aldrin says:

“I sense, especially strongly, my unity with our church back home, & the Church everywhere” (“...perhaps even on other planets”—I might add--rjt).

That story not only gives special meaning to today’s Gospel, which I just read to you from St. John, **BUT** it also underscores the way we, the branches, remain united with Christ, the vine.

We remain united to Christ by 3 ways in particular:

1st-by gathering in his name, **2nd-by listening** to his Word, & **3rd-by sharing** in his Body/Blood.

1st Jesus told his disciples: **“Where 2 or 3 come together in my name, I am there with them.”** Mt. 18:20

So, when we **gather** in Jesus’ name, we have his promise that he’s there with us.

2nd Jesus told his disciples: **“Whoever listens to you, listens to me.”** Lk.10-16 So, when we hear the Gospel read & explained, we have Jesus’ promise that we listen to him!

3rd Jesus told his disciples, **“Whoever eats my flesh & drinks my blood, lives in me & I in him.”** Jn.6:56 When we share the Lord’s Supper, we have Jesus’ promise that he’s united with us.

These are the 3 special ways, then, by which we remain united to Jesus: by **gathering** in his name, by **listening** to his Word, & by **sharing** in his Body & Blood!

Now, this leads me to an important point. What exactly is that important point, you ask?

Well, I am glad you asked that question!

My point is this: If we want to find Jesus today, we will find him in his Church, or we won’t find him at all.

Sometimes we hear people say: **“I can find Jesus & unite myself to him in my own way. I don’t need the Church.”** When we hear this, we want to cry out: **“But, there is no Jesus apart from the Church. The Jesus you are talking about died 2,000 years ago on Golgotha Hill.”**

The only Jesus there is today is the Jesus who rose on Easter Sunday. And this Jesus lives in his Church or he doesn’t live at all. As evidence of this, recall Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus, before his remarkable conversion. Listen to how the Acts of the Apostles describes it:

**“Suddenly, a light from the sky flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him,
‘Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute ME?’
‘Who are you, Lord,’ he asked.
‘I am Jesus, whom you persecute,’ the voice said.”** Acts 9:3-5

Paul was utterly confused. The 'voice' said that he had persecuted Jesus. He'd never persecuted Jesus. He'd never even met Jesus! He'd only persecuted his followers.

Then it dawned on Paul...as brightly as the light that had knocked him from his high horse:
Jesus & his followers were one! They were like a head & a body. Trying to separate Jesus from his followers... was like trying to separate a head from its body!

Years later, Paul wrote:

"Jesus is the head of his body, the Church; he's the source of the body's life." Col. 1:18

My final point: **Once upon a time**, a teacher used to say to her students:

"What if some unthinkable explosion destroyed all life on earth except for us, right here in this room. Where would the Church of Jesus be then?"

The students would always think a minute. Then they would see the light:

The Church of Jesus would be right there in their room. **THEY** would be the Church!

That little experiment makes an important point.

The Church is not a **PLACE** where people gather. It's the **PEOPLE** who gather. The Church is not a **PLACE** where people gather to pray. It's the **PEOPLE** who gather to pray.

Please note very carefully, what I said: The Church is the **PEOPLE** who **GATHER**. To have Church ...we must **gather together**.

You see, the Church is like the bread & wine we use at Mass. Hundreds of grains of wheat & hundreds of grapes had to be **gathered** to make them.

It is the same with us.

Only by **gathering together** do we become the **Church** of Jesus. Only by **gathering together** do we make Jesus' Church visible to the world. Only by **gathering together** do we make the risen Jesus visible to our age.

And so, by **gathering together** we give visibility to Jesus & his Church. Each time we gather, we show people where they can find the risen Jesus in today's world.

This is one of the reasons Jesus said to his followers in the Sermon of the Mount:

"You are like a light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid...."

"In the same way, your light must shine before people, so that they may see the good things you do & praise your Father in heaven." Mt. 5:14, 16

I close with this prayer:

"Lord, you are the vine & we are the branches.

As the branches draw life from the vine, so we draw life from you.

**Lord, help us remain united to you always, by gathering in your name,
by hearing your Word, & by sharing your Body & Blood.**

For in this way, we make you visible to our world.

Lord, help us remember always ...that where your Church is, there you are."

May our Almighty God, our Abba, bless you...

the Father, the Son, & the Holy Spirit. Amen.