

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Could this be the future of the Church:

The call to worship will come via a chime on your PC, laptop, I-pad, or smart phone. The Celebrant will then intone an opening prayer to which the congregants can Twitter there Amen. He then invites all to make sure their Bluetooth is activated so that they can download the Scripture texts of the day and the sermon. Following a 5 minute pause with music in the background, the Celebrant then says something like, “Let us now commit ourselves into God’s hands by opening our Apps, Twitter, or Facebook accounts to chat with God. After a 2 minute pause, again musically accompanied, the Celebrant invites the congregants to provide their offering by electronic transfers via their chosen electronic device. He then invites the congregants to consult Google map for the Communion kiosk nearest their home where they can visit the drive-up window to receive Communion. He finally offers the closing blessing to which the congregants again tweet their Amen.

This is one person’s playful description of where the Church is headed. Well, we’re not there yet...but who knows what the future holds? The amazing thing is that the church has survived as long as it has—especially since it depends on the likes of me, and you.

A friend encountered a man who woke up with a hangover. He says, “Your eyes look terrible!” The poor drunk says, “Man! You think they look bad? You should be looking out from this side”.

To those who find fault with the Church, I can only say, “You should try looking out from this side.”

The wonder is that after more than 2,000 years the Church is still alive, the Gospel is still Good News, and it continues to grow all over the world, especially when you consider those to whom the Lord entrusted his Church and his Gospel. How is this possible?

From a small group of people who witnessed Jesus being taken up from Mt. Olivet who then journeyed for a day filled with fear, confusion, and bewilderment to a hidden, out-of-the-way room in Jerusalem, the church has not only survived, but grown to include hundreds of millions of people over the whole earth. How did it happen?

Well, according to our first reading today from the Acts of the Apostles, it began when these witnesses to the Lord’s Ascension, who “devoted themselves with one accord to prayer together with some women, and Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and his brothers”.

With your kind consideration, I would invite you to reflect on this verse with me for a moment. The Scripture tells us “they devoted themselves with one accord,” which is to say they were in agreement; they stayed together; they were not just there with one another, they were there for each other. Or one could say they were bound together by their

common experience of Jesus—his life, his teaching, his suffering, his dying, his rising, his ascending—that gave meaning to their lives as both individuals and as a group.

Being together, what did they do? They prayed. We don't know what they prayed, but we can imagine—they prayed over their uncertainty about what it all meant; they prayed over their fears of the certain danger in which they felt themselves to be; they prayed as to what the future held for them.

We also know that they did not pray alone. They prayed “together with some women, and Mary the Mother of Jesus, and his brothers.”

We don't know who the women were or who the brothers were that are referred to, but we do know that they prayed with Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Can you imagine the comfort she brought to those gathered in that room; the serenity, the courage, the strength, the abiding love?

It was from that room that the Church was born.

This morning, I would like to offer for your consideration, my dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, that is still what the Church is all about. It is about people as weak and broken as ourselves who have bound ourselves to one another out of our need for Christ in our lives and our love for Him. We come together to pray as the Apostles did, filled with uncertainty, fears of present dangers, and concerns for our future and the future of the world. And like them, we don't pray alone. We pray bound to the whole communion of saints who have gone before us, and we pray in union with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, our Blessed Mother, who comforts us with her serenity, courage, strength, and abiding love.

That's who the Church is. That's why we come back again and again and again. We know well that we are not all that God means for us to be. We are more aware of its faults and failures than those on the outside looking in. Yet God sustains us.

It is my contention today that God is with us precisely for these three reasons—our being of one accord in our devotion to Christ, our willingness to support one another in prayer, and the love of our Blessed Mother who comforts us with her serenity, courage, strength, and abiding love, as she prays with us.

Finally, there is a fourth reason that the Church continues to thrive and will until the end of time. We hear it in today's Gospel. Jesus is praying for us: “I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for the ones you have given me, because they are yours, and everything of mine is yours and everything of yours is mine, and I have been glorified in them. And now I will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world, while I am coming to you.”

So what we are seeing here are the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the Church. Being “of one accord” in our prayer, we draw power from one another. Praying with Mary and the communion of Saints, and knowing that Jesus Himself is praying for us, we tap into the very power of God.

Sometimes when we pray, we not only open up the storehouses of heaven, it also causes us to become the answer to our own prayers.

St. Francis cried over a poor little church and asked God to restore it and God said, “I want you to help me.”

Dr. Albert Schweitzer prayed for God to save the people of Africa and God said, “I want you to help me.”

Mother Teresa prayed for God to redeem the impoverished, dying people in the streets of Calcutta and God said, “I want you to help me.”

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. prayed for God to free his people in America and God said, “I want you to help me.”

Every time we pray, God looks for someone to answer our prayer, and in one way or another, it always involves the one who offers the prayers. Maybe that is why some of us are afraid to pray. Prayer is engaging ourselves in the purposes of God.

This story sums up the matter well. During the darkest days of the fight to end apartheid in South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu visited America. He was to speak in a large church in New York City. The Church was packed. The media was there in abundance. The Archbishop stepped into the pulpit, looked over the crowd, and spoke only one word, “Pray!” Then, he stepped out of the pulpit. The sermon was over. The Archbishop knew what had to be done. God’s people needed to pray. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Bound together as one in prayer. The horizontal and the vertical. Whenever both are present in the life of the church miracles happen. Where one or the other is absent, there is a lack of joy and powerlessness.

If ours is to be a Church of joy and power, we, like the first Apostles, must devote ourselves with one accord to prayer, together with others, and with Mary, the mother of Jesus, knowing that Jesus is praying for us that He may be glorified in us.