

"I Love....."

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I enjoy plays, but I never go to the theater. I love baseball, but ballparks are boring. I'm a fan of Kat, but I didn't go downtown. I'm a Packer-Backer, but I wouldn't like to be at Lambeau. I am a branch, but I don't have much to do with the other branches.

None of the above sentences make sense. For human beings, the most sensible way to understand activities involving crowds of people, is to be where the crowd is. Oh, it's possible to watch things on TV, alone in a dark room, but that's not the same as being there. And if one is a true believer, there is nothing like being right next to the action.

That's why the last sentence is odd for a believer in Christ. I'm a believer, but I don't go to church. Isn't that like saying, I'm a branch but I don't need to be connected to the vine? If I'm connected to the vine, I'm connected to the other branches, right? And as a human being, not a vegetable, being connected means more than waving my leaves across the arbor. I share sap. I talk. I intertwine.

The True Vine went to the synagogue according to his custom, he went to the great feasts at the Temple with his family as a matter of course, and his immediate followers encouraged us not to absent ourselves from the assembly -- and they assembled on the Lord's Day for the weekly commemoration of the Lord's

Resurrection, for prayer and the breaking of bread (which was not any old lunch).

The more I write, the more I am sure I have written this column before. The more I think about it the more I am sure that I have spoken these words to many who will take the time to read. I could say, "Go to Church!" or "Follow the Commandment!" or "The Eucharist is the Source and Summit of our faith."

They're all true, and I'm supposed to say those things. After all, I'm a professional. This is my life's work and my livelihood, to be in the Church when everybody shows up. To make sure there's Mass when I leave town and to not leave town too often so that folks remember what the pastor of St. Joseph's looks like.

But as a branch of the Vine. As the pastor of a flock. As one through whom the Word speaks. As an *alter Christus* at the altar of Christ. What I really mean when I don't see people from Easter to Easter or Christmas to Christmas or Spring to Fall or even week to week -- what I really want to say, in my name and His, is... "I miss you."