***LIVE LITURGY AND LIVE THEATRE***

***COME BACK HOME***

Most of us have been able to live through a major pandemic, and many of us are now back to some normal patterns of behavior — but not all of us. In fact, once we returned to a more normal pattern, we have noticed that not everything that we remember has resumed, especially those groups which were already just “breaking even.” In order to accommodate and to comply during the Pandemic, we saw immediately two major declines, among others: Church attendance and Live Theatre attendance. For those who were committed to both, it meant finding live-streamed Liturgies and, if not live-streamed in the “fine arts” part of our being, engaging with television even more than before, and new ways of accessing entertainment on our computers. People often do not consider what that meant for those whose income and sense of vocation as it relates to theatre were effected.

Apart from the individual loss was the loss of the places where they offered their talents on the stage, or built the sets, or handled the sound and lights, or worked in the box office. Many of those theaters simply closed, and in many instances, have never reopened. The community was dispersed in many cases, and many people who have loved live theatre have found new ways to see theatre — not live, but recorded. One might be able to say that the consumers — in the end, get what was desired — entertainment — but did they? The only interactions before and after watching recordings of theatre on a screen might be with the refrigerator or the pantry! The sense of community is gone, and the interaction with the cast and crew who hang on every word of the audience to determine if they have fulfilled their vocational offering is gone. In a utilitarian way, the consumer/audience can report that they had a definable time of entertainment as they watched a screen in their houses, but that was it. Looking at the names of the cast and crew at the end of the movie is not the same as visiting with them after the performance. It is sad to report that not all attendance has resumed to its pre-Pandemic level in live theatre venues, and even more sad to report that some of those venues have closed, never to be reopened. Live theatre is a bit like Liturgy: it builds community, it allows people to use their gifts and talents, and it builds life-long relationships. As the word “Liturgy” translates, it is “the work of the people.” I suppose if some theaters could, they would have a sign out front that says, “Come Back Home.”

We see some of the same principles at work in the Church. During the Pandemic, the live-streaming of Liturgy became somewhat normal, and it has been a great blessing to those who are “place bound” due to their health issues, and also sometimes due to their work schedules and imposed Sunday morning responsibilities. But like theater on the screen instead of on the stage, Liturgy on the screen and not in the Nave and Sanctuary simply is not the same. Apart from the fact that we cannot receive Holy Communion from a screen, the sense of community is removed. The “cast and crew” of the church receives no feed-back, and there is no interaction before and after the Liturgy. People with musical, liturgical, and social gifts and ministries were greatly inhibited during the Pandemic, and sad to say, not all of the people have returned to church and a number of churches have actually closed — never to reopen. The parishioners have been dispersed, and their precious sense of community has disappeared. The inability to return to the place where Sunday after Sunday, Liturgy after Liturgy was the high point of their week is now severely altered. The “screen” helped during the Pandemic, but when our churches could be filled again, some of those churches were no longer there. In a utilitarian way one might say “Liturgy is Liturgy,” “Church is Church,” but for many of the Faithful they had done everything they could to maintain their Sacred Community, only to discover that it could not return. In many ways, churches could have a sign out front that says, “Come Back Home.”

One may conclude that life is simply a matter of acceptance of the many changes that are thrown our way, but we cannot count on others to do what we need to do, if we are physically able to do it” — Live Liturgy and Live Theater, and we can be a part of making certain that there is a future for both. **Come Back Home.**