

What drives Catholics to sit with God other than Sunday?

The only obligation Jerry Frank felt driving downtown to St. Jude Shrine, Baltimore, was an obligation of heart.

It wasn't a Sunday morning – it was a Wednesday. And St. Jude's isn't Mr. Frank's home parish; he attends Church of the Nativity in Timonium.

What drives Catholics to attend Mass, sit in shrines and visit chapels on days other than Sunday?

"The place has special meaning for me," said the semi-retired FBI agent, "Everyone comes for different reasons. Everyone has their own story."

While nursing his wife through cancer more than 12 years ago, Mr. Frank visited the shrine with his wife to specifically pray for her improved health.

"My strife is over," said Mr. Frank, whose wife died, "but I pray for special intentions."

It was the ninth novena in a row that the 64-year-old had attended in honor of his spouse. Driving 25 minutes away to St. Jude and participating in novenas periodically is "a little self goal," he said. "It's the presence of being there, praying with people of like interest in the spiritual aspect of St. Jude."

"Because as virtually everyone," said Father Jeffrey S. Daus, "from the humblest and simplest of saints to the most learned theologians, seems to grasp, there is within us a deep yearning for an experience of God."

The pastor of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary then quoted St. Augustine: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee, O God."

Father Daus believes human beings have an innate sense that not only does God indeed exist, but he desires an intimate and personal communion with us.

“In turn, we desire that same intimate and personal communion with God,” he said.

It would take much research, he added, to quantify the percentage of Catholics who do “extra credit” by sitting with God and saints in shrines, churches and chapels.

Yet from his perch as pastor of a national shrine and tourist destination in Baltimore City, he sees much of this prayerful behavior.

The basilica - as is St. Jude Shrine - is “a place that some come to as a kind of ‘pilgrimage’ destination,” he said.