

Dear Parishioners,

Throughout our history a debate has raged between those who say faith alone will bring us salvation, and those who say we are saved by the works we do. St. James addresses this debate in the second reading for this weekend. It is a debate that rages on today, only it is a silent debate. What do I mean by this? We do not hear as much about the "faith and works" issue as we did even twenty years ago, but the attitudes are obvious.

So many people today seem to have the attitude that organized religion is not necessary. They believe in God. They find that they can pray in their own ways, and that they do not need sermons, rituals, or the practice of communal worship for their faith. In other words, they only need prayer that is private. While I would never want to diminish the power and goodness of private prayer I can't help but wonder if perhaps this attitude reinforces the idea that "my own private individual faith is all I need in order to be saved." Whereas, the Church talks about the necessity of the Mass, the Sacraments, and private prayer; we who believe in Jesus Christ are called to worship God as a community of faithful people who see the Church as a necessary part of our lives.

On the other hand there are those who find that they must invest themselves completely into a high piety for fear that if they do not they will risk offending God and end burning forever in the fires of hell. One Roman Catholic group preaches that those who belong must carry out several different types of prayers, devotions, and harsh penitential practices so they can guarantee that they will get into heaven. In other words, they have to be holier than the Church itself in order to be saved. One of the dangers of this attitude is that there is very little joy in this kind of life because those on this side of the debate dread the loss of heaven and fear the fires of hell more than anything.

There has to be a proper balance in our faith. Christ calls us to recognize him, to love him, and to worship the Father with true devotion. This kind of faith demands a sacrifice: we must take up our crosses each day and follow in the footsteps of Jesus the Christ. This means we make a commitment to love, serve, and honor him, not only so that we can earn our way into heaven, but because way deep down in our souls there is a sincere and loving desire

to follow him. When we have this desire to love, serve, and honor Jesus Christ we find a deep and abiding joy, even in the sacrifices the life of Christian disciples entails.

Living our faith is not as easy as praying privately, in our own little ways, when it's convenient for us. On the other hand, living our faith does not need to be so painful that there can be no joy. Christian discipleship demands both faith and works because God blesses our lives with the gift of salvation through our faith and in the ways we put our faith into action. One without the other is not necessarily sufficient for our salvation. Those people who are truly joyful disciples are the ones who recognize that they are experiencing the life of salvation right now because they are people of faith who love, serve, and honor the Lord.

In joyful hope,

Fr. Tim Seigel,
Pastor