

Dear Parishioners,

“I don’t need organized religion. All I need is to talk to God on my own time, in my own way, and I will be fine.” Do you know when I hear this line the most? It’s when I’m at family gatherings like wedding receptions, or family reunions. I’ve even heard this line from some of my own distant relatives: people I don’t know very well. I also hear this line from engaged couples preparing for marriage. I have also heard this line at times from parents who bring their children in to be baptized.

The “I don’t need religion” way of thinking is not recent. St. Paul struggled with this notion as well. In his first letter to the Corinthians St. Paul explained that his Jewish ancestors who were freed from their slavery in Egypt were all given many special gifts and graces during their journey through the desert. God performed mighty signs to convince the Pharaoh to let them leave Egypt. Their liberation could not have happened without God’s help. Once they were free to go God saved everyone all at once, he did not save them one person at a time. God provided food and water for all the people of Israel during their journey, not just the ones who prayed to him in private. Unfortunately many of the Israelites complained against God. They were impatient. They didn’t like the food. They felt their lives as slaves were better than their struggle through the desert. Because of this, none of the people of that generation was able to experience the promised land God was going to give them. They ended up dying in the desert. St. Paul goes on to say that what happened to them is a warning to us, ***“Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall. (I Cor. 10:12).”***

How secure are we in our faith? Is it true that all I have to do is talk to God in private in order to be saved? Is it true that I do not need to worship with the faith community in order to have a happy, healthy relationship with God? Is it true that I do not need the Church’s laws, teachings, doctrines and dogmas to form my faith? I

cannot think of a lonelier or more difficult way to experience faith than by being secure in my own little way, at the same time ignoring the truth of the gospel which calls us to share in the experience of being the Body of Christ in the world as the Community of Believers: the Church.

Of course, if you are reading this letter, that probably means you went to Mass and picked up a bulletin which means you are more than likely in agreement with me. So here is what I would like you to do: share this letter with someone you know who thinks he or she does not need religion. When you share this letter give that person the entire bulletin too and point out that there is a phone number if he or she would like to give me a call. Let them know our Mass schedule. Finally, and most importantly, in the most gracious, hospitable, and generous way you can, invite him or her to come and worship with you next week. Perhaps we might be instrumental in helping that person come to an even deeper realization that salvation cannot be achieved through individual effort alone. God comes to save all of Israel, not just the ones who think they can pray to him all by themselves.

In joyful hope,  
Fr. Tim Seigel