

Dear Friends,

When I was a boy both commuter and freight trains ran through my home town all the time. In the late 1960's the commuter trains stopped. By the mid-1980's all train activities stopped. Today most of the tracks that ran through the middle of town are gone. Train horns, and the rhythmic sounds of the cars passing through town are not heard anymore in my hometown. It makes me so glad that just on the other side of the field behind the rectory the freight trains still rumble through, even in the middle of the night. I love that sound the trains make.

Once when I was very young, not even a teenager yet, I was walking by the tracks and was amazed to see the stray stalks of corn growing along the sides of and in between the tracks. Birds probably dropped the corn seeds along the tracks, or maybe some of the cars were filled with feed corn that spilled out. As I would look down the tracks either to the east or the west, as the tracks turned around the bend, I saw lots of stray corn stalks growing along with a lot of other weeds.

As I stood staring at the corn an elderly gentleman came up to me and asked me what I was looking at. As I explained my fascination with the corn stalks I spoke about how I wanted to pick the ears of corn that would grow from them. I hoped that I would be able to gather them up and sell them at the grocery store, or to my friends at school. I thought I had a treasure on my hands. Then he told me the sad truth about those corn stalks.

He said they would never grow ears of corn. When I asked him why he said there were two main reasons. First of all, he said the state would be coming around any day to spray all the plants growing along the tracks, and so the corn would not live long enough to grow ears. Then he told me that individual stalks of corn cannot grow any ears. Corn needs to grow in the fields.

Later when I de-tasseled corn I learned about male and female rows of corn, and how the male rows germinated the female rows and that it was the germination process that enabled ears of corn to grow on the stalks.

I tell you this story as a metaphor about prayer. So often I hear people tell me they do not need to worship at church, or in the context of an organized religion. All we need to do is say a few prayers in the car on the way to work, or before we crawl into bed, and we know that God loves us, and everything will be alright. As we begin to focus more on our own individual needs and wants even the idea of prayer becomes for us a very private relationship with God that includes no doctrine, no formation, no sacraments, no way for faith to be germinated by the love and prayers of the community to which we belong.

In many ways I wonder if we are becoming like stray stalks of corn growing along the tracks, green and happy in the summer sun light, yet destined to never become what corn is meant to be.

Like the corn growing in the fields we need the community of worship and praise, the sacraments of the Church (especially the Eucharist), and a loving connection with our faith community in order for us to become what God creates us to be; the living, and life-giving members of the Body of Christ called to bear great fruit for the salvation of the world. We cannot do it alone. We need each other in order for the Body of Christ to feed a hungry world.

In joyful hope,
Fr. Tim Seigel