

Dear Friends,

This weekend I am in Marion, Iowa, to celebrate the 50th Wedding Anniversary of my parents, Jim and Sheila Seigel. Since I am unable to preach this weekend, I would like my letter to be like a homily. There is an important message in the Gospel for this weekend that we all need to take to heart, especially in regard to the way we worship.

“Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments. (John 14:15).’” John has Jesus saying these words to the eleven Apostles during the Passover Meal on the night before he died. Jesus’ commandments were simple, yet challenging. He told them, “Love one another as I have loved you.” He told them to forgive sins, to proclaim the Gospel, to be a loving presence in the world. He told his disciples to take up their crosses each day and follow in his steps. Love was God’s motivation for sending Jesus into the world (see John 3:16). Love is our motivation for being obedient to the commandments Christ gave to his disciples, and in so doing, to you and me.

How obedient are we to *this* loving call? One of the most important commandments Jesus has given us is, “Do this in remembrance of me.” In this commandment Jesus is talking about receiving the Holy Eucharist. It is his desire that we receive his living flesh and blood, soul and divinity, within our lives. He is saying to us that we need the Sacrament of Eucharist for our salvation; not only so that we might receive the reward of eternal life in heaven some day, but also so that we might bring the love of Christ into a world that is starving for his presence.

We are living in an age, however, in which there is tremendous apathy and, I would dare to say, ignorance about the importance of the Eucharist in our lives. Pope Benedict XVI, in his visit to the United States last week, spoke repeatedly about our increasingly secularized world of materialism and relativism. We are more concerned about obtaining more stuff for ourselves, while at the same time failing to meet the needs of the poor. What is most relevant in our culture is our own satisfaction, meeting our own needs and dedicating ourselves to what we want and expect our lives to be. Meanwhile, all that we once held sacred no longer seems to matter, not even the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which the Church teaches is the source and summit of Christian life. There are a lot of people today who believe they can call themselves Catholic and Christian just because they were Baptized, but believe they don’t need the Body of Christ in order to live out that call to Christian discipleship.

Those of you who are reading this letter obviously attended Mass this weekend and picked up a bulletin. Good for you. I'm happy for you, and I truly missed being with you this weekend (although being with my family is really important, too). However, we all know people in our lives who need gentle reminders about the importance of keeping the Commandments of Christ. Here is one that you might want to share:

*“The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin.”*

Why is missing Mass a “grave sin?” It is a grave sin because people are deliberately choosing to disobey the Commandment of Christ. When people deliberately refuse to receive the Body of Christ into their lives, they are causing grave (or deadly) harm to their relationship with Christ, and therefore with God, and the Church.

I write these words because we are nearing the end of the Easter Season; a fifty-day celebration of the Risen Christ who calls us to everlasting life in God's kingdom. The days are getting warmer and longer. At the same time, we have come to the end of our religious education program for this year. After this weekend parents won't have to bring their children to religious education classes, which is another excuse for not even driving into the parking lot at St. Catherine Parish.

My hope in writing this letter is that perhaps we can work together to encourage people to have a change of heart about the Mass. Those of us who attend regularly know the value of the Mass, but that value cannot be for us alone. We are responsible for each other, and we need to try to be encouraging, supportive and, most of all, welcoming of all our brothers and sisters, especially those who have been deprived of the Body of Christ, even if by their own choice.

I will see you next week.

In joyful hope,  
Fr. Tim Seigel