

A View from the Pew

April 20, 2008

Get Me to the Church on Time

Another Sunday morning; too little sleep on Saturday night; too much to do that didn't get done during the week...a mad dash to get to the church on-time. Maybe this is an all too familiar scene in your life.

Sometimes the first opportunity one has a chance for reflection on days like this is on the way to church. For some of us, on some days, we find ourselves thinking we might like to be somewhere else, doing something else – “doing something fun” or “getting some work accomplished.” It really seems to be an imposition on life some Sundays. Do we really have to go to church today?

It occurred to me on one of “those mornings” that I never hear anyone asking, “Do I need to eat today?” That seems like a given; that is something we all not only expect to do, but want to do; it fulfills a basic need.

So, don't we need to feed our spiritual lives? I think most of humanity has a spiritual hunger. Man attempts to feed it in many ways. Even the “non-religious” among societies search for a deeper meaning in life and yearn for a connection with something greater than them selves.

In this context, do we attend weekly services out of an obligation to fulfill a commandment from God – to satisfy the needs of God to be worshipped – or do we go to satisfy our need? After all, God doesn't “need” our adoration, does He? We are the ones who benefit from acknowledging the wonder of His graces to us and from giving Him praise. Isn't “keeping holy the Sabbath” really about the nurturing we receive? God is not left wanting by our failure to praise Him, we are. God is not left hungry, we are.

Feeding our hungers is an innate response – be it our physical body or our spirit. We may have choices of what we eat and where we dine. I guess some days we may choose to stay at home and cook, other days we go out for Italian cuisine. “No, I don't feel like Thai food tonight!” We have developed sensitive palates and discriminating tastes. We may tend to prefer variety in our diets. Shouldn't the same be for our spiritual hunger?

It seems though that those choices about where and what we eat are often more about the social structures and ambiance surrounding the meal, than the benefits of the food itself. We enjoy the act of getting dressed to go out, look forward to the conversations with friends, and

savor the glass of fine wine with the dinner. The taste of the food is only part of the experience, and perhaps not the most important part.

Maybe the same is true for worship too. Maybe at church services we are often more involved in the act of going to services, the interpersonal interactions with the congregation or our emotional response to the music than to the celebration of the mysteries of faith and the worship of the Divine. If that is the case, it may leave one feeling as though they were at a Chinese restaurant – it was delicious, but an hour later you are hungry again!

Unless the focus is on the spirit-led and spirit-fed connection, perhaps weekly worship can feel like a burden – like going out to dinner at the same place with the same people all the time. Feeding our

hungers is an innate response. Perhaps it is important to remain childlike in approaching and appreciating these inherent acts. The advice in the epistle, 1 Peter may be critical. "Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation-- if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good." (1Pet 2: 2-3)

Do we long for spiritual milk? For our souls, milk - a simple, basic and natural source of nutrition, may be what we really need, not a gourmet meal. We may not know how fulfilling unadorned devotion can be and we may not long for it, unless we have been nourished by simple food in a time of great hunger - experienced a true and satisfying connection with God in a simple worship service, that is, unless we have "tasted that the Lord is good."

In the musical, My Fair Lady, Alfred Doolittle, the father of the underprivileged Cockney girl Eliza, wanted to be at church for his wedding. He had a desire to be there for a specific event that was important to him. Shouldn't we also long to be there for the celebration that gives us what we want and need?

Ding dong! The bells are gonna chime...
Hail and salute me Then haul off and boot me...
And get me to the church, Get me to the church...
For Gawd's sake, get me to the church on time!
- My Fair Lady

That's my view from the pew.