



SAINT JOHN FISHER PARISH

September 15, 2019

Dear Parishioners:

Below is a summary of an article that I wrote last month in *Peninsula News*.

One expression I often hear is “I’m spiritual but not religious.” To be religious seems to mean being part of an organized religion, and some shy away from organized religion whether it be Jewish, Christian, or Muslim. Hearing that phrase, “I’m spiritual but not religious,” has the effect on me as someone scratching a chalk board. If I didn’t think being religious was important, I wouldn’t be a committed priest in the Catholic Church. Spirituality and religiosity go hand in hand.

When Jesus was with his disciples in Caesarea Philippi and asked them who people say the Son of Man was, and Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the son of the living God,” Jesus said, “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church.” (Mt 16:18) Jesus knew that if his mission were to be fulfilled, it would depend on a church that would survive him. Without the church the words and teachings of Jesus would not have survived.

Community is an important part of being a disciple. From the very beginning after Jesus’ death and resurrection, the disciples of Jesus banded together in community to pray, to read the scriptures, and to break the bread. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that the early community had their struggles and differences. Yet they continued to gather together in community, support one another, and especially take care of the poor and needy. They were both religious and spiritual.

To be spiritual and not religious can lead to individualism. “It’s something between God and me. I don’t need anyone or anything else.” Individualism can lead to isolationism. Isolationism can lead to alienation from society. Since the recent mass killings, many have asked what we are doing wrong. I don’t think there is one simple solution. However, I believe that religion has a role to play.

A recent editorial in the Wall Street Journal commented: “It is all-too-typical of most of these young male killers who tend to be loners and marinate in notions they absorb in the hours they spend online. They are usually disconnected to family, neighborhood, church, colleagues at work, or anything apart from their online universe.” The proliferation of tablets and smart phones can draw people into isolation. It is easier to text, tweet, play video games, and communicate through them rather than to interact personally with other individuals. If you are part of a community that cares for one another and participates regularly in activities, you will less likely feel isolated and alienated.

Spirituality is important. Prayer should be part of our lives. But if our prayer life is confined to a quiet communion with God, we are leaving out a critical element: the community as an instrument of God’s presence. Prayer also should be a communal activity. We pray with each other and for each other. We care about each other. We support each other. We reach out to others when they are hurting and lonely. In other words, we are both spiritual and religious.

Yours in Christ,

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Pastor