

“Jesus answered them and said, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled.’”

Do you ever think about why you continue to be a believer, why you come here each and every week as part of the Catholic faith, why you choose to remain a follower of Jesus?

I do from time to time.

Of course, for most of us it started with our families.

We were raised as Catholics.

We were taught the commandments and received the sacraments and learned our prayers and all those sorts of things.

But that’s not what I’m asking.

I’m asking why we choose to be here today, why we choose to continue to embrace and believe and practice your Catholic faith.

I ask myself that same question.

Of course, there isn’t one simple answer to that question.

We’re probably each here for a variety of very legitimate reasons.

PAUSE

Our faith is a gift from God, but it is kind of shrouded in a great mystery.

It’s not always clear as to why some people believe deeply, some believe half-heartedly, some don’t believe at all, and some believe that “religion” is a kind of curse word.

I’m not sure that anyone can really answer those questions.

We just cannot say for certain why some believe and some don’t or why sometimes our faith is stronger from one day than the next.

God knows, but we don’t.

That’s just the reality.

Today in John’s gospel, Jesus seems to know why so many people were following him all over the place.

Some probably were interested in what he had to say.

Some were probably just curious, wondering what all the hype was about.

Some probably were hoping to be awed by one of his miracles or some act he could perform to wow the crowd.

But there is a good chance that many came to Jesus simply wondering what HE could do for THEM.

“Jesus answered them and said, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled.’”

I wonder sometimes if that is the reason so many of us choose to remain believers, choose to remain connected to this thing we call Church, myself included.

It's not always easy to fully understand our own motives.

Most of our motives are mixed --- even when it comes to faith.

Yet, there is one particular place we can look to try to figure out the “why” behind the beliefs and faith we choose to hang on to.

And we don't have to look very far.

A good place to find evidence of our motives?

Our prayers.

Our prayers.

Our prayers say so much about what we truly believe.

And I don't mean the formal prayers of the Church.

I mean the prayers each one of us says in the darkness of our rooms and in the silence of our hearts.

When I look there, what I find is often one-sided.

The truth is, so much of my prayer life is asking God to do something for me or for someone I love.

God, I really, really need you to . . . fill in the blank

God, please do this one thing for me

God, my life would be so much better if you would justgive me the lottry numbers for next week.

In other words, much of my private prayer life can be summed up by the simple question . . .

God --- what can YOU do for ME?

Does that make me like those first believers, the people who seemed to be following Jesus from place to place simply hoping to “get” something from Jesus?

A healing?
A miracle?
A meal?

Put another way, do I see believing in Jesus as a means to get what I want in this life?
Or is it more than that?
CAN it be more than that?
MUST it be more than that?

In one sense, believing that there is a God and that this God is someone we can turn to for help is enormously important and essential.
It takes faith to believe that we are not in charge.
It takes faith to believe that our God loves us and wants what is best for us.
It takes faith to believe that we are totally dependent on him.
And we should continually turn to him for every good thing.

But that is not the last step in faith.

That is not the ending point.

That is really just the beginning --- the starting point for the sacred journey each of us is on.

And if we never move from that point --- never stop seeing God as just someone who is there for our own benefit --- then our faith will always be less than what it can be, our lives will always be less than they can be.

I think a mature faith, a deep faith, is not fully realized by only asking the question, "God, what can YOU do for ME?"

It's more fully realized and more authentic when we can recognize that God is already showering us with every good thing, already blessing us each and every day with all that we need.

In other words, faith is not about waiting for God to do something for us, but rather acknowledging that he already HAS done something for us and will continue to do so into eternity.

And when we can grow into that sort of understanding, our faith will strengthen and deepen and our lives will bloom in ways we can't even imagine.

And we just might find ourselves asking more important questions, more faith-filled questions, more loving and grateful questions

Like,

God what do you want me to do to further your kingdom?

What do you want me to do to bring more friends and family to you?

What do you need me to do to more fully understand the depth of your love for me?

God, what can I do for YOU?