

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Why I Go to Church

Once I got an e-mail from a woman who is a reader of my blog, “The Deacon’s Bench.” She’s having trouble with her faith. She wrote:

I was always told to go to church every Sunday, not to miss for any reason, so I could worship God. But why? Is God so conceited that he has to have millions of people worship him every Sunday without fail, in a certain way, at a certain time? If so, I’m not so sure I want to have Him as my God. After all, if He is so conceited, why would He care about our lives and what happens to us and our world?

So I suppose the real question I am asking is, why do you go to church? What’s the reason behind getting up every day, or even just every Sunday, and making the trek over to the church at some early hour of the morning?

Well, I suppose I could have told her that “I go to church because it’s part of my job as a deacon,” but that seemed pretty lame. And it’s not entirely accurate. There are many good reasons for going to church, above and beyond the obvious one (and even beyond the fact that it’s considered a grave sin to miss Mass intentionally.)

I thought about it. I prayed about it. And this is what I wrote back:

Dear A_____:

I go to church for many reasons: to pray, to sing, to talk to God (and, as John Denver put it, “listen to the casual reply”). I go to experience the beauty of the liturgy, which lifts my heart and mind to The One who created me. I go to share the experience of community (and communion) with those around me, to share fellowship and faith. I go to receive Him in the Sacrament of Communion, and in receiving Him, bring Him out into the wider world. I go for consolation, for inspiration, for transcendence, for hope.

I go to share in a ritual that is both ancient and new, and which has its roots in the Jewish sacrificial offerings of our forefathers: that I am part of a larger body of believers that exists today because of the many battles that were fought and lives that were lost for the profound and sacred words that make up our Creed.

I go because I can, and because many around the world can’t. I go because I live in a place that still cherishes devotion and piety and faith, and I cannot take that for granted. I go because I am free to do so.

I go to hear proclaimed out loud the timeless words of scripture, and to hear proclaimed, as well, the stunning act of love: “This is my body...”

I go because, invariably, I feel better for having gone.

I go to pray for all my petty problems and concerns, but also to pray for my family and friends, and even to pray for those I don’t like. I go because I believe that if I join my own prayers with those of the wider world, it just might do some small amount of good.

I go because it matters to me. I’ve been richly blessed, beyond my wildest imaginings, and the least I can do for God is to give Him back just one hour of my life on a Sunday.

I go because I love my faith, and I love my God.

I have no idea what she thought of my answer. She never got back to me. But thinking about why I do what I do helped to clarify for me the mystery and the beauty of the faith we share. So often, we do things like go to Mass without really thinking about it.

But try this: Think about it. You might be surprised at what you find.

