

ST. JAMES CATHEDRAL

September 15, 2008

Dear Friends,

This is a letter I have hesitated to write but I decided that the only way I could stop thinking about it was to do it!

Let me get directly to the point. Our attendance at Sunday during the summer months was quite impressive this year but I hasten to say that it wouldn't have been were it not for an unusually large number of visitors from across the country and even across the world. Seattle has definitely become a destination place for tourists and, happily, St. James Cathedral is the place many of them choose to go on Sunday. So, those of you who were able to get away for a vacation, or who have summer places, had your places taken by visitors, with the result that even though the number of our own parishioners at Mass during the summer was down, our attendance numbers remained fairly constant.

But vacations alone do not explain declining Mass attendance among parishioners and that leads me to an even deeper concern. Throughout the year there is a tendency for a good number of our parishioners to attend Sunday Mass quite irregularly. I guess I've been here long enough to get a sense (fallible, certainly, but still fairly reliable) about who is 'regular' at Sunday Mass and who isn't. If you are one who is not, I encourage you to give this some serious thought. Sunday Mass attendance is not optional for Catholics as you know, but even if it were, our faith ought to prompt us to *want* to be with the community each weekend, to actually look forward to the opportunity to join together with our community of faith as we give praise and thanks to God in the very best prayer we have, the Eucharist. There is no prayer that even comes close to it.

And wouldn't you agree that the one hour a week devoted to God at Mass is a small thing when compared with all the other things that claim our time and attention all during the week!

You know me well enough to know that I am reluctant to emphasize the aspect of obligation. I much prefer to appeal to your faith and to your understanding of the central importance of the Eucharist in our lives. Without the Eucharist, we die. It's as simple as that. It may not happen in a week or a

month, but it will surely happen. That's because the Eucharist is the source of everything we do as believers and it is also the summit of our Christian lives, the closest we come on earth to the great Liturgy of heaven. Why would we ever choose to deprive ourselves of something so important and so vital?

And it's not just a matter of dropping in for Mass here or there as convenience dictates. It's important that we belong to *a community with whom we regularly gather for worship*. It's important, too, that we find ways with and within that community to reach out in loving and caring service on some of the other days of the week.

I hope you will understand what prompts this letter. It is my deep concern for you and for the health and strength of our parish. Many of you are downright heroic about your weekly attendance and I applaud you. Some of you are disabled and dealing with serious health issues, yet you come. Some of you face the daunting task week after week of getting several children out of bed, dressed, and ready for Mass – no easy task. I applaud you, too! And some of you, believe it or not, drive to St. James each weekend from as far away as Olympia and Mt. Vernon! You deserve more than applause. And for the others who seem to take a pretty lax approach to this whole matter, I pray that you will seriously reconsider. When you regularly miss Sunday Mass, not only is your faith life compromised, our community is also diminished.

I am not so naïve as to believe that letters change people's lives. I know that only God's grace does that. And so let me conclude with an invitation (God's invitation, not mine!). The doors of St. James Cathedral are many and wide and there is a place for everyone, a welcome for everyone. Those of you who have been away for some time are as welcome as those of you who are present Sunday after Sunday. And so I leave you with this thought: our prayer and our parish will be immeasurably enriched by the presence of each and every one of you in the Cathedral next Sunday, and every Sunday after that!

Sincerely in Jesus our Lord,



Father Michael G. Ryan