

After elections a couple weeks ago the media reported how low the turnout was. This happens a lot. Americans would fight to death for our right to vote, but very few of us exercise the right. We are strangely comfortable making a distinction between what we say we believe and what we actually do. This shows up not just in the poll booth but in our religion as well. We believe in the freedom of religion, but we don't know how to promote religion.

Some recent news items deal with American morality. President Clinton received communion at a Catholic Mass in South Africa. The pastor said he was just following what the bishops had instructed. The Catholic bishops of South Africa recently expanded the occasions on which a non-Catholic could receive communion. The Vatican claimed the pastor had misapplied the norms. A typical American said the president shouldn't be receiving communion because of all the moral transgressions he has committed. The president can't convince people when he denies the allegations about his behavior, even though we say the accused are innocent until proven guilty, and even though his popularity ratings soar. It's hard to follow the connections between what all these parties believe and what we do.

On Good Friday this year the Boston Red Sox played their home opener against the Seattle Mariners. Since Good Friday also was Passover this year, the owners gave in to Jewish and Christian leaders of the city and sold no alcohol during the home opener--the first time that happened since prohibition; it pleased a lot of fans, but one asked, "Didn't they drink alcohol in the Bible?" The game began at 3:05, after the sacred three hours; the Red Sox only got two hits for the first 8 innings, then came back in the bottom of the ninth and won on a grand slam home run; (no alcohol on Good Friday--anything can happen.) The Yankees opened at home on Good Friday this year at one in the afternoon; business as usual at the concessions. Cardinal O'Connor said he won't go to any games this year in protest. The Royals opened on Good Friday two years ago at one in the afternoon with very little protest. They have finished last ever since. We believe in baseball; we believe in holy days, but we have trouble putting it all together.

People want a moral society; there's even an editorial in the paper this weekend defending the morality of big tobacco. People believe in a moral society, but we have trouble making it a religious society. Like we believe in the right to vote but we have trouble doing something about it.

In the scriptures today we hear how people first reacted to Christianity. Some became believers. Some doubted. And others fell into a different category. Acts says the believers were all together; "None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high esteem." Isn't that nice? A lot of people held the believers in esteem, but they would not dare join in.

Easter summons us to commit ourselves again to our belief. At the most basic level, it calls us to meet the risen Christ present in our community every weekend, to receive the eucharist and to serve one another. That's just basic. If we get that much in place we can move from a society that believes in religion to a society that practices religion too.