Emily Dickinson’s Poem 236: How We Worship

As someone who has attended church all of my life, Emily Dickinson’s poem 236 could not be more relatable. I went to Sunday school every week, but I was still not sure of what was before me, so it’s relieving to hear someone with similar thoughts. Her unstructured outlook on faith has me once again analyzing the flaws in organized religion and understanding that my faith is more of a personal relationship rather than a location to gather with others of the same “faith”. This speaks to me on a personal level because I oftentimes don’t want to attend church, and I would much rather sleep in and pray or worship on my own schedule and not early in the morning.

Although Dickinson speaks from her experience in the church from many years ago, her words remind me of my relatively recent upbringing in the Christian church. From my experience, many churches are much more focused on aesthetics than principles, creating a phony environment for worship. Many churches have amazing and beautiful cathedrals that costs millions of dollars to create, but I don’t believe that’s necessary at all. The money that is used towards these purposes can be used for much more beneficial things such as helping the homeless or creating shelter for those in need. These flashy elements could distract a person from the true purpose of attending church. Many priests and pastors emphasize so heavily on giving an offering of money every week -- which isn’t necessarily wrong -- but this may cause people to think that their faith or acceptance to heaven is bought. Any place of worship should be a
welcoming sanctuary for anyone and everyone, yet those establishments that are ornately
decorated leave people feeling obligated to dress to impress, an expectation that is unrealistic for
many. If someone’s Sunday Best is merely jeans and a t-shirt, they shouldn’t feel unworthy of
attending service or feel as if others will judge them due to their attire. Church is a place to
worship God, not a place to worry about others. After all, only God can judge.

Furthermore, one set place to gather and worship shouldn’t be necessary at all. In her own terms made me feel more dignified to push to do the
same. I have found that it’s much more comfortable to express my spirituality wherever I’m
feeling connected, just as she did. It doesn’t matter if I am in my bedroom or in my car, because
it is my own personal relationship, just as I would have with someone in my family. It shouldn’t
matter if a person is alone or if they are gathered with family and friends at home or at a park.
Above all, it’s nice to be comfortable and cozy in a relaxing environment.

Aside from the physical aspects, organized religions can also sometimes create distorted
ideas of what faith really is. The texts that religions are based on are open to interpretation and
there are so many different translations to these religious books that many people are left to
question which one is the right one to follow. It might be easier to figure out if all Christians
read the Bible and decided for themselves. In addition to making independent decisions, reading
the Bible, Quran, Torah, etc., could help one feel more connected to his or her higher power by
cutting out the middleman. This creates a more intimate relationship and allows the person to
speak more freely as their heart desired.

Organized religion may make it hard for a person to know what to believe and also it can
affect the way that person expresses their beliefs. Structured practices could make some feel
pressured to prove their faith to others, regardless of how strongly they feel internally. It’s
shocking how something as simple as missing a Sunday service or not knowing The Lord’s Prayer could have someone receiving backlash over how dedicated they are to their worship/faith. People act as if it’s impossible to be faithful outside of the church walls. These attitudes can also leave people feeling like -- as long as they abide by the rituals -- they’re in good faith and nothing more is necessary when the reality of it is that one’s faith is a lifestyle.

In conclusion, Poem 236 generated deep thought within me on organized religions. Dickinson’s words resurfaced memories from when I was a young, skeptical Christian and reassured me that I’m on the right path in my spiritual journey. In the end, I’m content with my beliefs and I agree totally with what Dickinson is stating in this poem.