

Have you ever wondered where the phrase you're on a "need-to-know basis" comes from? More than likely the expression has military origins. When the government, or the military, believes that certain information is extremely sensitive, the files are placed under severe restrictions. Access to that information is limited only to a few people, who absolutely need to know about it, in order to fulfill their duties. In these cases, the government does not want someone who is unauthorized, or lacking proper security clearances, to be privy to sensitive data.

But being on a "need-to-know basis" exists in other contexts as well. For example, *wiseGEEK.com*, a website dedicated to providing clear answers for common questions, tells us that "when authorized engravers work on a new set of printing plates to produce government currency, each engraver receives only a *section* of the finished design. In this way, no single engraver ever sees the entire printing plate, so he or she can never be coerced into reproducing it for counterfeiters."

Parents are another good example of living according to a need to know basis mindset. They generally do not tell their children everything, because they don't want to burden their kids, or cause them to worry about things children should not have to worry about. And if we are honest, these days if someone tells us that we're on a "need-to-know basis," we probably wouldn't be that offended! In fact we are fed so much information via social media, the internet, television, and newspapers that we might be even be relieved when someone says we are on a need to know basis. We see too much, we hear too much, and we talk too much, and we are more than well aware that knowledge brings responsibility, and sometimes ignorance is bliss!

So, it probably isn't all that surprising for us to hear that God, does not tell us everything, that with him we are on a need-to-know basis. If you don't believe me, check out the first chapter in Acts when Jesus tells his disciples that there are

some things they do not need to know. He declares, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.” But here’s the thing: Sometimes, we *do* need to know!

In today’s Gospel story, clearly, the disciples fall into the category of needing to know. Lately they had been spending some time in the temple together. It’s possible that the disciples had never been to the big city before. It may have even been their first trip to Jerusalem. They probably had not wandered far from the Sea of Galilee, which gave them their livelihood. So, when you take country kids to the city for the first time, or bring some uneducated fishermen from the uncultured north, you’re going to get kids or fishermen who are mightily impressed with what they see.

All of the disciples were awestruck and amazed. “Look at these buildings! So cool! Look at this temple! And the size of the blocks of granite! Wow!” No wonder, then, that as they were leaving the temple, some of the disciples remarked on the beauty of the temple, expressing their astonishment at the size of the stones used to construct it. “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!”

Jesus, on the other hand, was not impressed. Of course, he’d been to the temple before and he had even held a theological seminar there at the age of 12 for some of the most learned rabbis of the country. Jesus told the disciples that the temple was just a heap of rocks. “Ah, you’ve noticed! Yes, these buildings and stones are huge, but let me, let you in on a little secret. The day is coming when not a stone will be left untouched. This place is going down!”

After this comment, the disciples and Jesus continued on their way. But when they reached the Mount of Olives, four of the disciples — Peter, James, John and Andrew — took Jesus aside and away from the others (perhaps they thought the other disciples did not need to know), “and they asked him privately, ‘Tell us,

when will this be, and what sign will there be that all these things are about to be accomplished?”

Surprisingly, Jesus agrees with them, there are some things that they need to know — to a point. At the end of this chapter, Jesus reminds them, “about that day or hour [when the heavens and earth will pass away] no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” So Jesus begins to share what he knows, and what he feels these four disciples are ready to hear. Which begs the question, “What does he say, and what does it mean?”

Our reading this morning is only a small part of what Jesus says to them. Here’s how he begins: “Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.”

Ok, so what do the disciples need to know? What do we need to know? Well, for starters we need to know **that false shepherds exist**. False shepherds are always lurking — looking for sheep to swindle. And their selling point? That whereas most of us are on a need-to-know basis, they are not. They are among God’s inner circle, and therefore have access to knowledge no one else has. But, they are more than happy to broadcast and publicize that we too can know what they know.

Be cautious, Jesus, says. What you need to know...is that no one knows more than you do right now. He will later say that neither he, nor the angels, know what is only known to God. In other words we need to be careful about signing on with a charismatic leader who claims to have knowledge no one else has!

Another thing we should probably know is that **faithfulness to God is not about buildings, regardless of their size.** The temple was beautiful. No doubt about it. But that temple built out of stone and marble was eventually destroyed in 70 A.D. All that remains of it is a wall. Yet, the church of Jesus Christ, almost 2,000 years later is alive and well. True, we may worship in buildings, but God does not live in buildings made by human hands. God dwells in the human heart. God dwells in us; as the famous Sunday school song we know and love goes, “I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together!”

It probably would also benefit us to know **that our faith is linear.** In other words, our faith is not circular. Life doesn’t keep going round and round in meaningless and repetitious circles of suffering and despair. Rather, it is headed toward a culminating point — a point about which we know very little. There was a beginning, and there is an end point. God did not create us, and the world in which we live, to languish indefinitely with the consequences of our sin.

Our God is a God of history. God is going to wrap things up. That is our hope! Jesus told the disciples that when the temple comes down, it is not the end, but the beginning of the “birth pangs.” We need to know that there is no cause for alarm! Sometimes when everything is falling apart, coming down around us, things are really, for the first time, coming together.

A Catholic priest named Michael K. Marsh writes, “I remember the morning of my divorce. I remember the afternoon my younger son called and said, ‘Dad, I just joined the Marines!’ I remember the night my older son died. With each of those events, one of the great buildings of my life was thrown down. Stones that I had so carefully placed, and upon which I had built my life, no longer stood upon one another. My world had changed and my life would be different.” He goes on to write that we all build temples, and many of them come crashing down. Jesus

reminds us that in the midst of the rubble, God is standing there and is prepared to help us rebuild.

Ok....since we have been talking a great deal about things we need to know, we may begin to wonder if there are things that we don't need to know? For example: The Russians partied so hard when World War II ended that the entire city of Moscow ran out of vodka. We don't really need to know that. Or that more people die while taking "selfies" than from shark attacks. We probably don't need to know that either! And, speaking of Sharks, my grandson Asher loves them so much that he wouldn't wear a pair of shark slippers we bought for him because he was afraid he would hurt them. You definitely don't need to know that, but it might be fun for you to know it!

And, although I'm sure at least a few of us would admit that we would love to know when Jesus is coming again, that isn't something we need to know! If we did need to know, we would have been told. Our Lord would have given us more details about it, but instead we're on a need to know basis! We don't need to know what is going to happen tomorrow. If we did, we'd have been told. As Jesus declares in Matthew 6:34, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." In other words, "We're on a need-to-know basis."

Two Sundays from now we will celebrate the First Sunday of Advent. As we approach a new year in the church liturgical calendar, and as we enter the Advent season preparing for the celebration of the birth of the Christ child, we are reminded to "keep awake" and to "stay alert!" So...let's watch the way we live. Let's prepare our hearts for the day-to-day demands of living. Let's be in a state of readiness to welcome Jesus into our hearts in whatever manner he comes to us. After all those are things that we definitely need to know today and always. Amen.