

The ending of the account in today's Gospel reminds us of just how important the Eucharist is in our lives, certainly a sore subject in our current situation. Jesus was recognized in the "breaking of the Bread." It may be helpful today to review the other ways in which Jesus is present, lest our focus on the Eucharist, central though it is, is not the only way in which Jesus is present. So rather than focus on his absence, we would all do well to focus upon his presence.

Vatican Council II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy offered some new teaching with respect to the presence of Jesus. Here's the key section:

He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the **person of His minister**, ... but **especially** under the **Eucharistic species**. By His power He is **present in the sacraments**, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes [21]. He is **present in His word**, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are **read in the Church**. He is present, lastly, when the Church **prays and sings**, for He promised: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20)¹ (emphasis added)

Vatican II teaches that Christ is present in the person of the priest, a most humbling and challenging teaching. I say humbling because it must never, ever become routine to celebrate the sacraments. Sure, ministry can be tiring, but it is no more tiring than the faithful laity who work hard every day and then return home to take care of a family. It is challenging because if we forget whom we represent to the people of God, our priesthood will quickly become imperiled. It is only about Jesus.

The Council also states that Christ is present in his Word, that is, in the Scriptures. At our 10:00 a.m. Mass, Easter would typically feature a deacon carrying in the Book of the Gospels.

¹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, December 4, 1963, paragraph 7

This book differs from a complete Bible– it contains the various Gospel readings throughout the whole year. A lectionary containing the first and second readings are not be processed in at Mass. Only the Book of the Gospels is processed, because it alone contains the words of Jesus.² The Gospel Book represents the presence of Christ in our midst by means of his word and has been in use liturgically since the 8th century.

Jesus is also present where two or three are gathered and pray and sing. Guess what? That refers to you, right there at home. Even if you are alone, we are gathered with you, and thus we are gathered in his name. We have published the hymns in the liturgy guide, and as strange as it may seem, you are invited to sing along. Today, I invite you to seriously consider that which you have, rather than all the things that you do not. Yes, it is easier said than done.

For some reason, I did not remove the Confirmations from my personal calendar, and so I receive the perfunctory notification ping 15 minutes before. “Oh, we would have had another Confirmation now.” Perhaps I do so to keep a sense of normalcy. I am not sure how else to explain it.

If you are feeling disappointed in things today, including in the Churches still being closed, I appreciate that. But we mustn’t underestimate that the death of Jesus both scattered his disciples and shattered their hopes and dreams. They *had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel*. They saw the cross as defeat and could not comprehend the meaning of the empty tomb until the Lord appeared to them and gave them understanding.

Jesus chided the disciples on the road to Emmaus for their *slowness of heart* to believe what the scriptures had said concerning the Messiah. They did not recognize the risen Jesus until he had broken bread with them. This raises key questions for us too. Do we recognize the presence of Jesus, both in his Word and when we gather together for prayer in his name?

² General Instruction of the Roman Missal, # 120d.

A sign in the entranceway of an English castle open to the public reads, "It is the duty of the host to make his guests feel **at home**. It is the duty of the guests to remember that they are not."³ To our first communicant class, to our Catechumens and candidates, so patiently waiting. Please know that Jesus is not only a guest in your heart and soul. He wants to make your heart his home.

We are the guests invited to the great banquet of the Lamb, our Savior Jesus Christ. You will all one day, hopefully soon, be able to receive the presence of Jesus in this most unique and special way.

The Risen Lord is ever ready to speak his word to us and to give us understanding of his ways. And do not forget the zeal of those same disciples after their breakthrough. They quickly set out again to Jerusalem, another seven miles, and this time at night! Their excitement could not be contained. Can we hear their voices or see the excitement in their eyes?

Can we appreciate what a difference of just a few hours made in their lives? Let us pray for the same zeal and excitement in our lives; zeal for His Word, zeal for his presence in our midst and the desire to share what we have found with others.

May the Lord Jesus Christ open our eyes to recognize His presence within us and our minds to understand the truth of His saving Word. May He nourish our hearts with His life-giving word and with the Bread of Life.

³ *Reader's Digest*, March, 1983