

Love and Presence

Presence matters. If there is one thing we have learned from covid, its that. Presence matter. For example, before covid, there was a lot of hype about online education. It was going to make expensive Abrick and mortar@ schools obsolete. Students would be able to learn anytime anywhere at their own pace virtually for free. But no one is talking that way anymore. Everyone, students, teachers, parents, everyone could not wait to return to in person instruction. Who=d have thought that sheer physical presence could be so important to education. Or to our mental health for that matter.

We could not wait to return to in person Masses either. When talking about creating the sacred online, I always begin now by a disclaimer: I don=t mean zoom masses. Today=s Gospel tells the story of one of Jesus= disciples for whom presence mattered. Hearing that his friend was alive was not enough. He needed Jesus present before him. It was not enough for him to hear about Jesus, it was not even enough for him to see Jesus. He had to feel Jesus to believe that Easter was

Love and presence--these belong together. That where love is strong, mere words will never be enough. But today=s Gospel also teaches that when love is strong, sheer presence can work miracles. When we are frightened or sorrowful, when we feel like hiding and withdrawing into ourselves, we need to remember that what we really need is the presence of those who love us. And when those we love are fearful or dejected and we feel helpless because we don't know what to say or what we can do , we need to think back to those cowering disciples, and remember that our mere presence, our simply being there is more powerful than anything we could ever say or do.

Love builds. It builds community as we see in today=s first reading. Once Jesus appears, the disciples devote themselves to one another as well, pooling resources, breaking bread together, both literally and liturgically. They were awed by the new spirit in which they lived, wonders were worked through faith in Jesus= resurrection bore within them and amongst them. And their hearts were filled with gratitude.

Gratitude may be the essence of a mature faith. For gratitude means that we take what we have as a gift, or in religious terms, as grace. Hearts filled with gratitude see all as grace. And

hearts filled with gratitude are inspired to respond in kind, to freely give what has been freely given. Paul's very definition of the Christian calling.

The presence of Jesus transforms fear and guilt into love and gratitude. It is for this that God does not simply command from the heavens, but takes on flesh in the incarnation and returns in the flesh in the resurrection. May God's work become flesh once more in our own flesh and blood, now that with covid behind us, we can meet up again in the flesh with family and friends, neighbors and colleagues, even strangers and enemies. Meet up and no longer take it for granted now that we had lost one another's bodily presence for a time. May we see Christ, the Word made Flesh, in this world of flesh and blood.