

## Reflection #3: Increased Desire to Meet the Lord and Be with Him

*“As soon as is possible... we must return to the Eucharist with a purified heart, with a renewed amazement, with **an increased desire to meet the Lord, to be with him**, to receive him and to bring him to our brothers and sisters with the witness of a life full of faith, love and hope.” - Cardinal Robert Sarah, “Let Us Return to the Eucharist with Joy”*

The exodus of the Israelites through the desert found them wondering at various times if God was still with them. Would God be true to his covenant promise and lead them to a place where milk and honey flowed? Amidst murmurs and crying out, they were presented with “a food unknown,” manna—which literally means, “What is it?” “When they asked he sent them quails; he filled them with bread from heaven” (Psalm 105:40). This “bread from heaven” reassured them that God accompanies them on their pilgrim way and would never abandon them against their will. Manna fed their hunger, but it was an acquired appetite that had to be cultivated by deeper faith and trust in the God who stretches our stomachs, our senses, our hearts and minds.

God leads us into unknown territory in our lives, and asks us to offer our hunger, spiritual poverty and vulnerability to him. He has allowed us to enter a global pandemic that has left us feeling parched and exhausted. Like the Israelites, we are tempted to grumble and desire to go back to the way things were. God may meet us on our turf and terms, but does not let us remain locked into the familiar. Jesus calls us out of ourselves to the virtues of faith, hope, and charity for the sake of a communion that endures forever. This enduring relationship with the Triune God is itself the “promised land” sought by the Israelites. The pandemic is a most recent opportunity to be purified within, to recognize the presence of God, and to find comfort in our dependence on Christ.

Pope Francis speaks often of a “church of accompaniment,” a term derived from the words “cum pane,” meaning that we literally and spiritually “break bread” with each other. The privileged company of apostles at the Last Supper who heard their Beloved Master call them “friends,” not slaves, were initially scattered by the chaos of the crucifixion into their isolated cells of fear and shame. Yet as they made their way back to the Upper Room with Mary and others, the Risen Lord breaks into their midst, unlocking their hearts with peace that only the Spirit, and not the world, gives.

A new habit of being with one another, especially on the Lord’s Day, is formed. When breaking open Scriptures, then the bread before lifting up the cup of salvation, the bond between them is sealed, for they know Jesus is mysteriously present in their midst. Though they soon go forth to live Jesus and announce him to others, this spiritual bond remains a source of strength and consolation no matter where the pilgrim path leads.

While livestreaming liturgies may be a temporary solution for our inability to be

actually present to Jesus and one another, they are no substitute for the “presences” of Christ we encounter in Mass: first and foremost, in the Eucharistic species of Host and Precious Blood; in the Scriptures proclaimed and preached, in the priest who acts in the person of Christ as head of the Body; and in our sisters and brothers joining together with us in prayer.

Those who gather live out their baptismal priesthood by giving thanks, making sacrificial offerings of themselves before God, and blessing God and one another by building each other up in faith, hope and love. Jesus gives himself to us in the Eucharist--as Host and guest of our hearts. We respond: “What is it you ask of me, Jesus?” so that we may truly BE Christ’s Body to one another, to a hurting and hungry world.

Beyond the opportunity to bring the Eucharist to the sick and the homebound, the reservation of Jesus in the tabernacle refracts God’s tender love, a lamp shining in the quiet stillness of a sacred space that holds a magnetic attraction for those who keep company with Christ in their hearts. Even if we are the only person in the church praying before the Blessed Sacrament, our adoration is never a solitary act between Jesus and ourselves, but is always an act of the Church. The communion of saints and angels surround us, each reflecting a unique ray of light our way of what it means to be in Jesus. St. Caesarius of Arles counsels, “Just as you enter this church building, so God wishes to enter your soul, for he promised: ‘I shall live in them, and I shall walk the corridors of their hearts.’”

If we heed the Spirit’s promptings, eventually even holy devotions such as the rosary, novenas, chaplets and other ways we enlist words will often yield to sighs and groans, to cries and unspoken praise. “O sing to him, sing his praise; tell all his wonderful works! Glory in his name; let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice. Turn to the Lord and his strength; constantly seek his face” (Psalm 105:2-4). St. Ephrem reminds us that our praise unites us to the silent praise of angels.

Even if the gravitational pull of our own humanity keeps us at ground level, we remain blessed by the Lord who draws close to us as we approach him. The immediacy of his presence accessed by faith is a constant source of grace and gratitude that we are never alone. Jesus accompanies us every step of the way to the Father.

### ◆ Reflection Questions

- *Where do I most easily recognize how God accompanies me and others? Where is it hardest to recognize?*
- *Where and how does Jesus want to meet me in my hunger, spiritual poverty, and vulnerability?*

### ◆ Petitionary Prayers

- *For a renewed desire to return to Sunday Mass, that hearts across our Diocese may burn with a longing to encounter Christ in the Eucharist, in the Word, and in the gathered Body of Christ, we pray...*
- *For those who hunger to receive our Lord in Holy Communion, that the homebound, the sick, those in institutions of care, those who shelter from disease, and all who hunger for our Lord may soon be able to satisfy that hunger with the bread from heaven, we pray...*