



Presence: Physical vs. Virtual

Sample Homily

To Be With Those I Love

At one COVID-19 vaccine clinic, they invite people waiting in line to fill out a card with why they are getting the vaccine. The cards are then taped on the walls of the waiting area. The primary reason people write for receiving the vaccine isn't to return to work, to go back to restaurants or bars, to take a vacation or even to stay healthy. The reason most often cited? To be with family. To be with those they love and who love them.

During this last year, we've found ways to see and hear each other, like Face Time or Zoom meetings, but we all know that these virtual connections are a poor substitute for a hug from grandma or a high five with our friends. Like the difference between a lightning bug and lightning, many things mean much more when we participate physically rather than observe virtually. As natural creatures, while we can engage our minds remotely, we yearn to be together physically because we need physical presence to truly connect. We were made that way, created with both mind and heart, soul and body by a loving God.

That same loving God has also given us sacraments that are also natural, combining deep theological meaning with everyday natural elements. Even during the pandemic, Baptisms still require water, the Eucharist still requires simple bread, and anointing still requires oil. We experience water, bread and oil in our homes everyday. In the church, during the sacraments, these natural elements become so much more, they become holy. In the same way, our everyday lives become so much more when we engage with the holiness of the sacraments in person.

God created us with five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. Scientists tell us that the more senses we use to encounter or learn something the more we remember. That's why we learn more from experiments than just a textbook. When we watch Mass online, we only use two of our senses. We don't get to smell the incense, touch the pews, or taste the bread become the Eucharist.

To simply follow a team's progress, you can read the score online or watch the game on TV. But it is much more engaging to be there in person. Not just for the stadium experience, but to feel the emotion and power of the crowd as they cheer the home team. In person is just more real. And while a professional game is better in person, seeing a family member's sports game in person is not only better, but brings us closer to that person. In the same way, being in person for the sacrament of the Eucharist increases the grace of our prayers and intensifies its good effect on us through an in-person encounter with our God who loves us infinitely.

Now that vaccines are rolling out and case rates are dropping, we can see forward to soon being able to hug our loved ones. We also have the opportunity, starting now, to be with our parish community at the ultimate celebration of love, the Eucharistic celebration. Now we have the opportunity and the privilege to stop following the mass virtually and start following our Lord with not only our heart and soul, but with our physical presence so we too can be with the One we love.