

Homily for November 14, 2004

33rd Sunday of the
Year of the Eucharist

By Father Charles Bowes

At Mass, we meet the Lord Jesus; we meet no less than God in bread and wine and word proclaimed and one another.

Imagine that you're coming to church next Sunday. As you come through the door, you realize that someone is right behind you, and you naturally hold the door open for that person. As he comes in behind you, you suddenly realize that it's Jesus himself, looking just as you always imagined him. What do you do now? What do you say?

I suspect that most of us would do whatever we could to make Jesus feel welcome in our community. Of course, it's not very likely that he'll show up next Sunday, looking like a first-century Jewish rabbi. But indeed he will show up here, and he'll probably look different from our usual image of him. Christ will arrive looking like your neighbor or your friend, or perhaps like a person you've never met before. He might look like a member of your family – your little brother or big sister or even your spouse. Or, he might look like a homeless person who needs a bath and a haircut.

Our faith tells us that Christ dwells in every member of his body, that we can find him in the people who gather with us here every Sunday. That's the deepest reason for us to be hospitable to one another as we assemble for the Eucharist. So often, we hear people say that the Catholic church is not very friendly. That, by the way, is not usually said about our parish. In fact, quite the contrary – folks visiting or moving here for the first time comment when they register that they feel welcomed and warmly greeted. But the reality is that when strangers visit a Protestant church, they're usually warmly greeted and made to feel quite welcome. Many people report a very different experience in most Catholic churches. Of course, many Catholic parishes are very large, which makes it harder to know who is a visitor and who is a member of the parish. Maybe that just gives us even more reason to be hospitable toward everyone around us, whether stranger or friend...especially on those days when we're apt not to feel so warm and friendly.

Through the week, all of us who are members of the body of Christ are scattered throughout our

community. On Sunday, when we come to Mass, we need to reconnect with the other members of the body. Saying hello and smiling to those who gather with us can help us to connect again. Brief conversations about family members and other concerns can express the love of Christ that binds us to one another. This is not irreverent in church, because it's the way that we welcome the Lord into our midst. Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). His presence in one another is the first way that he reveals himself to us at Mass. Reverence requires us to recognize him there and to respond to him in one another. This doesn't have to be loud and raucous, but it does have to be sincere and caring.

This gathering and reconnecting with the other members of the body is an important step in getting ready for Mass. Christ invites all of us to share in his sacrificial offering to the Father. We can only do that as members of Christ's body, so linking up with the other members of the body helps us to get ready to worship together. Let's take a moment now and, in silence, each try to answer the question: How will I welcome Christ the next time we gather here?

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