May 31, 2020: Pentecost

This morning as I was celebrating the 9 am Mass at Saint Mary’s, and as I was about to pray the Collect, I could hear my cat Harry yowling. He wanted to come into the Church because I was there. Lately, Harry has developed a desire to get into the Church whenever I am there. When he realizes that I have gone through the door into the church, he will start yowling to be let in. I, of course, cannot usually accommodate this desire. But, this morning I found it particularly amusing, because when Harry is being ignored he tends to get louder and louder. And that is exactly what he was doing. Eventually he did give up, but it was again pretty funny to listen to his caterwauling at the beginning of Mass.

I realize that many of you probably have felt the same way. You wanted to be inside the church as much as Harry, but it was not really about the building. In the midst of one of the most trying moments of our lives we needed the comfort, the solace, the support, and the familiarity of our community. The building represents so much about what is important and essential in our lives. It is a testament not just to our individual faith, but to those who have gone before us, and to those with whom we gather to celebrate that faith through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

To be separated from that most primal connection created a heartache of its own. Yes, we, of course, can pray anywhere, and in one sense we do not need a building to worship God. But the reality is that gathering together as a community of faith is central to our identity: it is essential to us, both as a people of faith and as members of the human family.

We are made in the image and likeness of God. And God, as Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), is a community within Himself. The reality of God’s very being is not solitary and isolated. Rather, God is a community of being: each person of the Trinity reaches out to the other to be in relationship. And again, it is not one on one, but rather, each relationship supports and gives strength to the other. God’s desire for community is expressed in a direct way through creation itself. God did not need to create; He chose to create, and hence, expanded the sense of community beyond Himself. In his act of creation God chose to create human beings in his image and likeness. We are the image of the invisible God and, as such, we come to know ourselves best when we seek to live our lives in accord with our true nature.

This sense of physical isolation was, and is, difficult for the simple reason that—though very necessary—it contradicts what it means to be human. We are meant to be social beings in the same way that God is. And even for someone like myself, who is very much of an introvert, that disconnect with family, friends, and a community of faith has created its own strains. Our ability to gather once more, though in unexpected ways, is a good thing. We, of course, must still maintain our distance for the safety of others, but at least we are gathered in the same place as a community of faith to enact our most basic need—to praise and worship our God.

We have somewhat experienced what the early Church went through during periods of intense persecution. They were not always able to gather together, for the simple reason that if they did they could be put to death. We might also think of those immigrants who came to a new nation without the support of a community of faith. In 1808 when our diocese was established, it covered all of New England with only one bishop and five priests. They had to cover the diocese on horseback to support the spiritual needs of their people. It could be months before Catholics saw a priest, simply because there was not one around. That sense of isolation and loss could not have been an easy experience for the early Church in America. We now realize in a small way what that sense of spiritual loss must have entailed for them. And yet the Church grew and got stronger. And the same will be true for us.

It simply calls for us to seek and recognize what is truly essential. It calls for us to place a deeper trust in our God. It calls for us to recognize what our priorities and true needs should be. We have a chance to reclaim those parts of our lives that have been lost. We need to be honest with ourselves about how our priorities may not have been what they should be. Sometimes we only realize what we have lost when we can no longer connect with it.

What a blessing it is to be able to gather together once more. Not all of us can be here, yet for very good reasons. But we are once more united together around the Lord’s table. We have been gathered once more by the power of the Holy Spirit. We can once more express what it means to truly be a community of faith—united by the Spirit, drawn to Christ, our one and true mediator, who leads us to the Father.
What we have missed and have been desiring is much more than simply getting into a building. It is about gathering as a family of faith united in and through Christ.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

Fr. Brian