

SCREEN: missing you!

What have you missed the most in the past year?

Traveling, dining in restaurants, attending a concert or sporting event?

When people were asked that question,

'being with others' topped the list.

Being with others.

They've missed gathering with family, with friends, with parishioners.

They miss 'community'.

And yet, it is 'community' that has gotten us all through this past year.

It's looked different, even felt different, but there is no denying it has been *community*.

Community in hearing a loved one's voice on the phone or

through Zoom when you couldn't be with them physically.

Community in seeing and waving to a grandparent from a safe distance.

Community in drive by graduations, birthdays, and baby showers.

All because we have this innate desire for connection.

There's even a phrase that's been coined to describe this:

together apart.

SCREEN: together apart

'Together apart' is a perfect description for the many ways

we've experienced connection in the last year.

When Jesus gathered with his Apostles for the Last Supper,

he knew that his everyday life with them was about to be cut short.

He also knew that without his daily presence,

they would face really tough times.

And he wanted to give them something that would get them

through the challenges they'd face.

A way for Jesus and his disciples to be 'together apart'.

SCREEN: cup and plate image

He gave them the Eucharist - his very Body and Blood.

A brilliant, beautiful, sacramental gift.

It was Jesus's way of saying to them,

“no matter what may come, I will always be with you.

I will nourish and sustain you.”

And with the gift of His Body and Blood, he also gave *us* the structure of the Mass.

In doing so, Jesus taught them the importance of remaining together and worshipping together.

He even gave his followers this promise,

‘where two or three are gathered, there am I in the midst of them.’

As a parish, St. Pius has been so blessed in the past year.

We’ve experienced community through our online worship,

our drive up communion, our small groups and ministries that have met over Zoom.

It has helped us remain together as a parish.

And as I said, it’s been different, but the essentials have remained -

we’ve experienced true communion with God and with each other.

SCREEN: drive up communion photo

Not everyone has felt comfortable being back in our church building.

Many of our parishioners have felt safer worshipping online.

Early on in the pandemic we decided to offer

drive up communion for online worshippers.

On a typical Sunday morning, 80-100 people receive communion

while remaining in their cars.

And the way it is organized feels very similar to a communion procession in church pre-COVID.

At the prescribed hour, cars line up.

They are greeted by members of our host team.

They approach the eucharistic minister and receive communion.

I greet them and wish them a great day,

another host team member waves goodbye as they drive off.

For the regulars, we’ve become our own community,

greeting, asking about each other, smiling - connecting.

We’ve been united through prayer and communion,

made possible by Christ.

SCREEN: blank red background

God willing, the day will come when we can all be together again physically without fear or worries of COVID.

But one thing the pandemic has taught me as your pastor, is that as a church, going forward, we must be better.

Better at figuring out how to connect and stay connected - how to create community with each other, communion with God, and how to feed those who are hungry or hurting - physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Because the other gift Jesus gave us at the Last Supper was a command to serve one another.

SCREEN: Jesus washing his apostles' feet

He gave them the Eucharist - His Body and Blood - then immediately washed their feet.

He was teaching them the intimate, unbreakable connection between the two elements of worship and service.

It's a connection we must make sure we never lose, lest our worship become inward rather than outwardly focused.

Now, in past years, we would imitate Jesus's act of service and wash the feet of parishioners.

We won't be doing that this year.

But if you picked up your Holy Week kit, we included some instructions for how you can do this at home.

And if you didn't get a kit, all of the instructions are on the Easter page of our website.

All you need is a bowl of water and a towel.

It's one way to connect with Christ today.

And a powerful reminder of his command for his followers to build community by serving others.

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So this Holy Thursday, Jesus gives us two powerful messages.

First, with his gift of the Mass he reminds us he is always with us in the Eucharist and in the community of the Church.

And Jesus commands us to be his Body and Blood for others through service.

SCREEN: called, strengthened, sent

At the Last Supper, Jesus reminded the Apostles that they had been called, strengthened, then sent to build the Kingdom.

God has called you, strengthens you and is sending you to do as they did.

What does this mean for you going forward?

To help you figure that out, here is a question for you to consider:

what is Christ calling you to?

Is to work harder for community within your family, your neighborhood, your school or workplace, your parish, your nation?

How can you be Christ's Body and Blood out there?

How can you be a greater force for unity and communion?

One suggestion of a way to begin is to simply check in on people you know who are still stuck at home.

Just give them a call, send a text or email, simply reach out.

Ask if there is anything they need.

And also ask if there is anything you can pray for.

Start there, and I guarantee God will lead you to other ways to serve.

This Holy Thursday, be open to opportunities to be Christ's Body.

The needs right now are great.

Of that, there is no doubt.

When we live out our calling and go where God sends us, the Lord fills us.

We experience communion with Christ and we create communion with each other.

Amen. +