

Fifth Sunday of Easter / Year A / May 10, 2020 (Fr. Giese)

One of the things our faith in God gives us is the answer to the question, “Where do I belong?” Jesus answers that plainly. “You belong with me,” Jesus tells us, as we just heard in the gospel. Jesus was speaking to his disciples and assured them, “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. I am going to prepare a place for you. I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be.” Jesus makes it clear in his words that he wants you to be with him. Jesus’ actions in this regard are even clearer. Jesus entered our world as one of us in order to be Emmanuel, God With Us. Jesus suffered and died so that we might belong to him and not to sin. And Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to Heaven to prepare a place for us so that we might be with him.

This is a wonderful revelation of God’s desire for us and a tremendous consolation as we go through life, knowing that Jesus wants us to be with him. But more than a consolation, being with Jesus is a way of life. You see, Jesus wants to be with us now and for us to live as belonging to him now. Jesus reveals this in so many ways and in no uncertain terms.

For example, in Matthew 18 Jesus promises that, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them.” So, when you gather for prayer as a family or as a group of friends or as we will again here in our parish, Jesus is with you, with us, in our midst, encouraging us and strengthening us and enjoying our company. And that is wonderful. Sometimes praying in the presence of other people, even family members, can seem a bit awkward. Sometimes when we gather for prayer, we may come with a lot of things already on our minds which distract us. Sometimes prayer can seem to take more effort than we are prepared to make. It doesn’t matter so long as we come because when we come to prayer Jesus is there wanting to be with us and to assure us that we belong to him.

Jesus also wants us to be with him in our understanding of God’s values, or what is important to God. In John 15 Jesus tells the apostles: “I have called you friends, for everything I learned from my Father, I have made known to you.” To be with Jesus means to believe what Jesus believed, about seeking first the Kingdom of God, loving God above all things and your neighbor as you love yourself.

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To be with and live with Jesus means to understand the value of self-control as Jesus valued it when he taught that it is not what goes into a man that defiles him but the vile things that come from within that go out of a person that defiles him or her.

To be with Jesus and live with Jesus means to value marriage as Jesus did, as part of God's plans for humanity, that those joined in marriage are no longer two but one flesh, a sacred union between man and woman and that in spite of the challenges and difficulties of marriage to understand that it is an instrument of holiness for the couple, for the family, and for the human race. To be with Jesus is to uphold and encourage married people for the blessing their marriage is to the world.

To be with Jesus and to live with Jesus means seeing yourself as passing through this world and not holding on to grudges and hurts and offenses and not being obsessed with material things, neither of which we can take with us into the place Jesus prepares for us in his Father's house.

There are places and times when we expect to be in the presence and company of Jesus, especially in Holy Communion and the other sacraments, but to live life with Jesus also means being ready to encounter Jesus in unexpected places, like Cleopas and the other disciples did on the road to Emmaus, when they were leaving Jerusalem that first day of the week. Discouraged, sad, and feeling defeated they were on their way out of town. Jesus was absolutely the last person they would have expected to encounter on the road. But they did meet him and were with him in his company for the day, not realizing it fully until he blessed and broke bread for them in the evening. We too should be ready to be in the company of Jesus at any time, especially in moments of pain and hurt and stress.

We should also be prepared to be with Jesus when we are with those who are in need; the stranger, those who are ill, the hungry, the imprisoned, those without clothing. Jesus promised as much, that whatever we do to the least of his brothers, we do for him.

To belong to Jesus and live with him means to include the scriptures in our lives. He is the Word of God and Jesus speaks to us from them, especially the gospels and Jesus has much to say

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to each one of us. To belong to Jesus and to live with Jesus is to listen with an open heart to the words of Jesus.

You see, as a Christian you belong to Christ because you understand that Jesus died for you, for love of you. You understand that Jesus wants to be with you and wants you to be with him in every way. And you understand that as Christ has a place for you in his father's house, as you in turn have a constant place in your life him.