

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, B – January 14, 2018 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of Saint Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 8:30 & 11:00am Sunday Masses – 950 words

There is no place where God is not. Yet, even though he is omnipresent, believers have always sensed or experienced that he is, as it were, “more present” in some places; that, somehow, God favors certain shrines or other chosen places with his presence in a special way. Just to give one example, Assisi – the birthplace of St. Francis – is nicknamed the City of Peace; it was my experience – and many others have said the same – that there was a palpable peace there, a real sense of the presence of God.

But apart from places where we might feel that God is more present, our faith teaches us that he truly is present in a unique way in the Holy Eucharist – whether we experience or sense that or not. Wherever the Eucharist is, we can point and say “there is God”: there, in what appears to be mere bread or wine, the infinite God has chosen to be contained and accessible to us. Every Catholic church or chapel, then, is a place of privileged encounter with God. Our Lord is always waiting for us in the tabernacle. We can come and be very near to him here, or wherever the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. It is not necessary to make a pilgrimage to Assisi or some other special place to be near to God – though pilgrimages are good and traditional things to do. No, he is waiting for you in the tabernacle, whether you feel his presence or not.

If God is omnipresent, then why do we seem to have a need to be physically closer to him? We may ask this question of Samuel, who lived and slept in the temple. We may ask it of Andrew and the other disciple in the gospel, who asked Jesus where he was staying so that they could be with him there also. In these and many other places in sacred scripture, we see that men and women have always desired to be physically nearer to God. We are not pure spirits – we are body and soul: God may always be present to us spiritually, but we want to sense that we are near to him physically as well.

And we see also in scripture that those who draw nearer to God physically also come to hear him in a more profound way. Samuel had lived and slept in the temple for many years before he heard the Lord – but he really did hear him. Andrew and the other disciples first spent time with Christ before hearing him call them to be his first disciples. Indeed, they so benefitted from their time with the Lord that when he later preached about his Body and Blood in John chapter 6, and others were scandalized by his preaching and abandoned him, they responded differently: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life.”

We can pray to God anywhere and in any circumstance. But it has pleased him to reveal himself in a special way to those who draw close to him physically – to those who take the time to go to those places that he has favored with his presence. Apart from coming to church on Sundays and Holy Days, do you ever visit Christ in the Holy Eucharist? Our church is open for prayer from 6:30am to 2:30pm on weekdays, and of course it is open around confession and Mass times on the weekend as well. I am always edified to see people who stop in to pray during the week, or who come to Mass early, or who remain for a while after coming for confession. Visiting God in his house is a good and traditional thing. He greatly blesses those who do so.

Well, what should we do when we come to visit the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament? Eli had the right idea when he instructed Samuel to say, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening”. The most important thing is for us to open our hearts to God. There have been days when I was rather overwhelmed and all I could really do was be there before the Lord. That is enough! Speak – pray – if you can. But more importantly, and in any case, listen! Open your heart, calm yourself, recollect yourself, and simply be in God’s presence in a receptive way. It need not be for a long time, either; quality is always better than quantity. The Lord Jesus is always present in

the tabernacle, and how greatly it pleases him when we come to spend time – any amount of time – with him! Just think how often he is left alone!

Lent is exactly one month away; we need to be thinking about how we will draw closer to the Lord this Lent and beyond. I would like to challenge you: if you do not make a regular visit to the Blessed Sacrament – meaning at least once a week, beyond going to Holy Mass – start doing so. Whether you are out and about and stop briefly at the church during the course of your errands, or set a regular time, for example, to come to the chapel here or at OLS or at EWTN for Eucharistic Adoration – try to make at least one special visit to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament each week. You will notice a difference; I am very confident of that. God is always calling out to us in various ways. We need to pray every day, but the wise practice of interrupting our routine to make a physical visit to God helps us perceive more clearly how he is speaking – and it secures for us very special blessings.