

Sixth Sunday of Easter, A – May 17, 2020 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham – 5pm Vigil, 7:15, 8:30, & 11am Sunday Masses – 575 words

I have always been grateful to be your pastor and to see each one of you every week here at Holy Mass, as well as at other times in your homes, in hospitals, for baptisms, for confession, and in other situations. But those sentiments are magnified now, as we begin the process of returning to public worship and many of us see each other again for the first time in a couple of months. Who of us ever thought we would live through a pandemic – one which has not yet fully passed us by? Alas, if we reflected upon our many unusual life experiences, nothing should really surprise us anymore. But there are still surprises – and there are surprises that are also trials. Our good Lord is bringing us through this trial, and to him we owe our thanks.

As he promised in the gospel, he has not left us orphans. Even when we could not receive all the sacraments, or when we perhaps felt it not safe to do so, he has been near and available to us all. I hope you have experienced that closeness in a new way these past two months. The suspension of public worship began on March 17, and here we are at May 17. Some are not yet ready to return for various reasons, but are reading this homily online or listening to it via livestream. To them, also, I say: he has not left us orphans! He gave us the seven sacraments, and the sacraments are the primary and ordinary way he comes to meet us. But he is never bound by them. “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you”, he said.

How have you experienced the Lord’s coming – his presence – in a new way these past roughly two months? It is true: that closeness in an extraordinary way and situation can never substitute for the ordinary way that he comes to us. We need the sacraments, and it is good that we are returning more fully to them now, even as we still take precautions. We would never want to presume that we could get by apart from the system that our Lord established. But, as St. Paul says in his Letter to the Romans, he is always near. “I am convinced”, he said, “that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

This weekend, then, I want to leave you with this brief and simple message: the Lord is near, he is always with us. Thank you for your faith and your support throughout this time. To those who are staying at home for a little while longer: our prayers remain with you; we hope that we can all be back together again soon. May we never again take Christ’s presence in our lives for granted! What a gift the sacraments are for us – most especially, the Most Holy Eucharist. In the words of St. Peter from our second reading, let us “sanctify Christ as Lord in [our] hearts[, always being] ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks [us] for a reason for [our] hope...”. How can we not be hopeful, if we are secure in the knowledge that he will never leave us?