

Jesus said, “where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.”

Certainly, that is one of the deepest and most amazing revelations in all of Holy Scripture. Do we really get this? Are we understanding what this means? Jesus tells us, that when we are gathered together in His name, He is there in our midst!

That means, whenever we come together for the express purpose of setting aside all our other concerns, and for a specified period of time we devote our attention, our hearts and minds, our very souls and bodies to Jesus Christ, He is present with us. Reflect on that for a moment. Later today, or any day, take a moment and reflect on what Jesus has said.

It means that because we are gathered together here, at Notre Dame in Kerrville, Texas, on this Saturday evening/Sunday morning at this hour, for the purposes of praying to the Lord Jesus Christ, of hearing His word, of singing hymns of praise to Him, of glorifying His name, of receiving His Body and Blood, He is here among us even now at this very moment. We are at this moment in the very presence of God Almighty. We are gathered together in His name: and He is in our midst.

How do we grasp this truth? How do we apprehend the meaning of this? How do we apply this to our lives? What does one do when Jesus Himself comes to be in the midst of a gathering that includes you?

Think for a moment what you would do, if, in the next moment you knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that you were indeed standing in the

presence of Jesus Christ. It sounds like a fantasy, but just imagine it.

What would you do?

This is God Almighty whose presence you are now in. Would you immediately fall on your face before him? Would He even want you to do that? Would you speak to Him? What would you say? What does one say to God when you meet Him face to face? Does He do all the talking? How would you behave around Him? This is He from whom no secrets are hid. If we suddenly found ourselves in the presence of Jesus, we wouldn't dare do something we knew was sinful, would we? We are in His presence now.

The presence of the Lord is what life is all about. He created us so that we would be in His presence and to enjoy fellowship with Him. The name Emmanuel, which is another name for Jesus, means "God with us." We're supposed to be in His presence.

Under our present circumstances, we cannot have an awareness of being in the presence of Christ through our five senses. Yet He is there. So how does His presence impact us if we can't see him with our eyes, or hear him with our ears? It can't be the case that when we are gathered together in Jesus' name and he is present in our midst, that it's all for nothing. His being in our midst when we gather together in His name has a purpose.

There's an old saying that you're known by the company you keep. And I believe it's true. This is why parents of young children are so

concerned about who they pick for their friends. It's why when you're a teenager you're warned about "that crowd". When we're growing up, it makes a difference if we spend our time with others who challenge us, who bring out our best traits and reinforce them, or if we spend our time with people who lead us into temptation. If we're surrounded by people who expect the best from us, who encourage us to keep striving to improve, it's going to show in our lives. And if we're surrounded by people who don't care what we do, or how we do, that will show in our lives as well.

Being with someone for an extended period of time tends to make you become like that person. Married people come to be like their spouses in certain ways. Children become like their parents. The people we live with, or spend most of our lives with, "rub off" on us. And it's the same with God.

When we are in God's presence, over and over again, continually over the span of our lives, we become like him. This is especially so with God, more so than with our friends and family because that is God's purpose for our us. God wills for us to become Christ-like. And He takes the steps necessary for that to happen.

He has given us His word. We are to become like Christ through God's word written to us. If we hear it, read it, mark it, learn it, and inwardly digest it, we will become like Jesus Christ. His word will change us. This is why when we gather in His name we devote so much of our

time together to reading and hearing the Word of God. He is present to us in His word.

Jesus gives His very self to us through the Sacraments. As Catholics we believe in the Real Presence of Christ in Holy Eucharist. When we partake of the consecrated bread and wine that have become His Body and Blood, we are in his presence. And His presence changes us.

Now when we talk about being in the presence of Jesus, in the here and now, while we do experience the real presence of Jesus, we do not yet experience the full presence of Jesus. That's coming. We will experience the full presence of Jesus in the life of the world to come. In the meantime, we have something to do with how we experience the presence of Christ in the here and now.

It's possible to be in someone's presence without being really present *to* them. In other words, you can be sitting right next to someone, but you're just not really present to them. You can even be looking at someone and still be completely ignoring them. For instance – and I'm sure this never happens to any of you – sometimes a man can be sitting right next to his wife, and she'll be talking to him, but he's a million miles away. And after a while, she'll say, "are you listening to me?" You can be in someone's presence but not present to them.

You don't want that same thing to happen with God! When we gather together in His name and He is in our midst, we really don't want to be a million miles away. But as I was saying, since we cannot

communicate with Jesus like we do other people, since we can't hear him with our ears or see him with our eyes, how do we know that He is affecting our lives?

We may not be able to point to a specific date and time when it happened. But we can keep in mind that it is God's nature to fill up everything that he touches with Himself. In the Sanctus part of the Mass, we say, "holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory". If you continually come to God, He will fill you with His essence, with His own self.

In his letter to the Romans, Chapter 12 verses 9 through 21, St. Paul gives us a list of imperatives. These are commands for how we are to behave as believers in Jesus Christ. At the beginning of Chapter 12, Paul beseeches the members of the congregation at Rome, and to all congregations to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. And then he lays down this list of commands as marks of the true Christian: let love be genuine, hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good, love one another with brotherly affection, outdo one another in showing honor. Never lag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one

another, do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly, never be conceited.

How can we do any of that if not in the presence of the Lord? How can any of us hope to live like Paul describes and commands here, unless some of Jesus' personality rubs off on us?

We will never live out all those things Paul describes perfectly. But the more we are in the presence of the Lord, the closer we will get. Jesus has this transforming power and He means to use it on us. We become like God when we come to be in His presence, when we gather together in His name and He is in our midst.

Did you notice what Jesus says toward the end of the passage from Matthew about whatever we bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever we loose on earth will be loosed in heaven? That seems kind of odd and a difficult thing for us to understand. It's an old Jewish expression that refers to teaching, especially teaching about the faith. Whatever we teach here on earth will carry over into the next life. For one thing, that means teachers have a tremendous responsibility. But it also means that there is a continuity between our earthly life and the life of the world to come. Like it says in the Our Father, "on earth as it is in heaven". As I said, we experience the real presence of Jesus Christ here and now, but in the world to come we will experience His full, glorious presence.

The presence of God is the greatest thing there is. It is the greatest thing we can ever know. It is where we are meant to be and where we will finally become who God means for us to be. It is the answer to all things. It is the only thing that will last. Sometimes in this life it's all we have. Our only comfort, but our best comfort. Amen.