

Statement for Website
From Fr. Michael

17 January 2021

Writings: Staying

The two disciples said “Rabbi, where are you staying” (John 1:38).

You can learn a lot about people by going to where they are staying. You can tell whether they are a messy or neat person by how they organize their belongings. You can tell how crucial comfort is to them by the amount of stuff they have. You can tell what kind of music or books they like or their interest in sports or hobbies by what they own. All of this information says a lot about a person and helps to build a relationship with him or her.

In today’s Gospel, two disciples of John the Baptist go to see where Jesus is staying in order to better understand why Christ was called “the Lamb of God”. John’s version of how Jesus acquired his first disciples follows the more traditional pattern of Jewish students seeking out a rabbi to gain religious knowledge. Unlike the other Gospels, there is no indication Jesus had started his public ministry by proclaiming the Kingdom of God had come and the need for repentance (Mark and Matthew) or teaching in Synagogues (Luke). Jesus simply walks by, is called the “Lamb of God” by John the Baptist and this comment triggers the curiosity of the two disciples who approach him. Their desire to go to where Jesus is staying indicates a wish to form a relationship with him. A religious teacher intends not just to convey information about God and spiritual practices but to fully integrate them into a disciple’s life. This process requires time and presence. By going to where Jesus was staying, the disciples had the opportunity to learn about the importance of organizing their life with a clear vision of what is really important, how a simple lifestyle frees one to live out that vision and how a well thought out plan of action reveals one’s true preferences.

During this Covid pandemic one of the biggest challenges for people is that they can’t get together with family and friends. During times of stress, relationships are especially valuable as a means of giving and receiving support from loved ones. In our homes, we relax and can be more like our regular selves. Somehow having a Zoom Christmas dinner is not quite the same as being there. It is likely for this reason so many people ignored public health guidelines and gathered with family and friends over Christmas as the rising numbers of Covid cases and deaths show.

Perhaps Covid 19 is challenging us to think more deeply about our relationships with the important people in our lives. A clear vision of what is important about these bonds means we occasionally need to place the health and safety of loved ones ahead of our or their desire to be together. A simpler lifestyle means we are better able to share our possessions with the needy in our community instead of hoarding them. A well thought out plan of action means we place our preference to care for others ahead of our desire to look after ourselves. Our relationships with others need not suffer during this pandemic. We need to discover new ways keep them strong. The same is true for our relationship with Christ. The traditional religious practices (Sunday or Weekday Mass; time before the Blessed Sacrament; regular Confession) are not possible for many people right now. They are suffering because of it. During my time in self-isolation I can’t believe how much I missed celebrating Mass. Yet, I still felt Christ’s presence during that whole time as well as that of the Parish through the many phone calls to check up on how I was doing and food parcels which kept me fed.

For those of us dealing with Covid 19 in 2021, the place where Jesus is staying is not a physical location. If he is present in our hearts and minds, he is everywhere. Once we grasp this idea, it will help us keep our other relationships strong.