

Welcome, everyone, as we come together to make our offering of worship to God. I especially want to welcome you if this is your first time here at St. Gabriel's, your first time at a Catholic church, or you've come back after an absence. Whatever your situation, you should know that when you walk through these doors into church, we are all the same: sinners who know that we are sinners and are in need of and can find mercy from our loving Father. We have all taken different paths to be here today, and that's fine. That's life. Whatever that path has been, we can all find grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. Again, welcome.

One question that will sometimes bring people to church is, "Where is God?" It is a normal part of our life of faith to ask that question. It may be asked because of some suffering that was going on, and God seemed to be absent. It may be asked as part of our maturing in faith, trying to grow deeper in our understanding of God. The reason the question can be asked is because God is not visible. We cannot point to Him the way we point to some object.

This has been true since the Fall of our first parents. After leaving the garden, we no longer "walk with God," as the book of Genesis describes so beautifully. God does not want it to be that way, which is why He sent His

Son to us, because He wanted to reveal Himself to us. Christ came and proclaimed, “I and the Father are one.”

But now, as we celebrate the feast of the Ascension today, he is once again no longer visible. Jesus has ascended to heaven. Jesus' departure and ascension was both an end and a beginning for his disciples. When he departed physically from the apostles, they were not left in sorrow or grief. Instead, they were filled with joy and with great anticipation for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

We have all received the gift of this Holy Spirit. Beginning with our baptism and coming to completion with our confirmation, the Holy Spirit came upon us. Christ has become our Head, and we are his Body. And as his Body, it is now our task to make him visible to the world. Now, making Christ visible is no easy task. When he was here on earth, he was hard to miss. It got so that he couldn't even go into a town anymore because of how visible he was to the people of his generation. And that's because of the amazing things he did while he was here on earth. He drove out demons. He cured the sick by laying his hands on them. These are the things that made Christ visible to others. But after his Ascension, the same question can be asked: Where is Jesus?

That's where we come in. As his Body, we are called to make him visible. But does that mean we are called to do what he did? If we are going to make him visible to the world, do we need to perform the same miracles that he performed? That would be nice, wouldn't it? We could start to tell people about Jesus, and if they started to walk away, boom! Heal a blind man. That's not how it works for us. Those healings were meant to show the people that the time of the Messiah had come, not just to get their attention.

But the truth is, we are called to perform the same wonders that Jesus did, but not those miracles. Those miracles were not the greatest things that Christ did while he was on earth. They may have been the ones that made him the most famous, that brought people out of their houses in hopes of seeing a spectacle in the street, but these healings and exorcisms were not his greatest. The greatest things that he did were he loved others, including those who hated him; he forgave others, even if they didn't ask for it; he laid down his life for others for the sake of their salvation.

These are the signs that we are all called to do if we are to make Christ's presence seen and heard here on earth. When somebody expresses hate for us and a desire to harm us, or even has already harmed us, and we, in return, express love and a desire for that person's good, that is Christ present here on earth. When we forgive those who have sinned against us, and do not

condemn them because of what they've done to us, that is Christ present here on earth. When we sacrifice our lives for another, whether it is for our spouse, our children, our community, our neighbors, our friends, that is Christ present here on earth. That is what it means to be disciples, to be the Body of Christ. That is what we now point to when someone asks, "Where is God?"

And let me take a moment to point out that this is especially good for us to remember on Mother's Day. The sacrifices that a mother makes for her child on a daily basis and the prayers that she offers throughout her child's life can be one of the most concrete examples of Jesus among us. When we are in heaven together with our mothers, we will see and understand all that they contributed to our salvation without us knowing it here on earth, and we will be profoundly grateful. But we shouldn't wait until then to express our gratitude. It is right that we honor and offer our gratitude to our mothers here, because of the role they play in God's plan of salvation for us.

Performing these great works of love and forgiveness and sacrifice, whether it be parents for their children, spouses for each other, or for our friends and neighbors and co-workers, can either be the hardest thing we've ever done or the easiest. Which one it will be depends entirely on our disposition towards God. Have we submitted our entire lives to Him? Have we surrendered to Him and said, "Here I am, Lord. I have come to do your will?" If so, then

love and forgiveness and sacrifice become second nature. “God, you want me to forgive? Ok, I will. You want me to love? I want that, too. You want me to sacrifice? Yes, Lord.” If we view ourselves as instruments for God’s love and mercy, then we act according to His will.

So when we have difficulty with these things, when we desire to do them but just can’t find the strength, we must look at our lives and ask ourselves, “If I am a member of Christ’s Body, and he is my Head, why am I having such a hard time imitating him? Where is the disconnect? What am I holding back so that I am not completely united to my Lord?” Perhaps it is our pride that keeps us from making these sacrifices for others. Perhaps it is a lack of understanding of our own sinfulness and need for forgiveness that keeps us from forgiving others. Perhaps it is our bad habits that we refuse to remove from our lives so that good habits can take their place. Whatever it is, we must recognize it and overcome it, so that God can work through us.

Christ is depending on us to make him visible to the world. He has sent us the Holy Spirit, who will work through us, if we let Him. Let us not fail him. Let us love and forgive and sacrifice, so that the world will recognize our Lord in us, until he finally comes again and we can all see him face to face.