

Many Catholics come to mass grateful for people who are here and longing for people who are not. We come here to praise God and to share communion, but also to unite with others who believe, think and act alike. We all know folks with whom we'd like to share this hour of worship, other people who hold our beliefs and values, but for various reasons they are not always here.

The main argument for leaving home and gathering at church is our belief that Christ is present when we come. Our Church teaches that Jesus is present at mass in four ways: in the people, the very ones Saint Paul calls the body of Christ; in the scriptures, especially when we hear Jesus' own words in the gospel; in the priest, who is ordained to lead our prayer; and most especially in the eucharist, the body and blood of Christ under the forms of bread and wine. Once you believe that you encounter the risen Jesus every time you come to church, you never want to miss a week.

After the resurrection, the *disciples* had to be convinced that Jesus was really present. Even when he was standing in front of them, he still had to convince them that he was really there. "Touch my hands and feet," he said. "Give me something to eat," he said. They were looking right at him, and they still couldn't believe he was really present.

There are many reasons why people don't appreciate the presence of Christ among us. Even regular churchgoers have our moments when we sin, when we ignore the teaching of Christ, or turn away hoping God will not notice. In the midst of our troubles, it is hard for each of us to see the hand of God, hard to see that God is good, or that God has a plan designed personally for my benefit. In those times, we long for a better life, and we sometimes feel distant from God.

The disciples must have felt this too. When Jesus entered the room in today's gospel, his first words showed what he thought of the group assembled before him. He thought they were confused, off-balance, and troubled. He realized they had questions in their hearts. So he carefully chose his first words to them. He used the same words he had told them to use when he sent them two by two to proclaim the kingdom of God to people who had never heard it. The words are, "Peace be with you." To Jesus, whether you've never heard about the kingdom, or you heard about it but lost it somewhere along the line, you needed the same greeting, "Peace be with you."

We can't guarantee that every time you come to church you will leave the building feeling at peace. But we try. Before communion, we share a sign of peace; it's not just a hello, it's a genuine sharing of the peace within us that holds believers together. We experience it when we spend time with Christ. We believe Jesus is risen, and that he is present in the bible, the people, and the sacraments of our Church. If we make worship a habit, we should experience deep within us the greeting of the risen Christ, the greeting of peace.