

[I'm supposed to keep this short(er). We'll see if I pull it off] A couple months ago I preached a homily that began with a description of my high school look back in the 1970s – long hair, wide-legged jeans, etc. The next morning a young member of our staff sent an e-mail to the entire parish staff saying, “After listening to Fr. Nagel’s homily, I believe we need photo evidence that the long hair, wide-legged pants Kurt Nagel was actually a thing irl.” Then she put in parenthesis “(in real life).” I was struck by – and commented on – her including that translation of “irl” into old-person English for my sake. (And it was meant for me!) But I don’t think she was being any snarkier than usual. She was just trying to help an old coot out.

But that phrase – “in real life” has stayed with me. In some ways during this whole coronavirus time we aren’t living in real life. We do a lot of our work and social life virtually. It’s a blessing we have the technology. But this time is also reinforcing for us the difference

between virtual and in real life – and by “in real life” we mean person-to-person encounters in the same space, being physically present.

And there is no occasion where that distinction between virtual and “in real life” is greater than the Eucharist. I know it’s been really hard for many of you to be without the Eucharist. Spiritual communion is fine, but . . . here we are today – praying together again in real life. It’s good to see you all! I know mass outside isn’t ideal. But the main thing is we’re celebrating the Eucharist with Christ and one another.

This return is especially appropriate on Trinity Sunday. This Sunday is especially dedicated to this first and most basic dogma of the Church – that God is one, but one in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And it means that we, and the whole universe, were created by a God who is a unity in community. God is one, but not solitary. God is Love, and love is a communion of persons – and that means if we are to be who we’re meant to be, we too must live in the same communion of persons.

What does it mean for us? Well, one obvious point most of us have taken from this time of living virtually is that we need other persons to make us happy – and not just other people’s videos or words, but their whole bodily reality. Why? Because we’re Trinity-made creatures! So, one benefit of the quarantine time should be that we grow to appreciate one another more.

Think about the virtual spiritual life we’ve been living these months. Has it made you miss celebrating the sacraments with one another? What about missing those parishioners we haven’t seen since public masses have been cancelled, even those people in our parish we may not get along with? There are those we have judged as politically dangerous, (in these tense times in our country there’s a real danger that we start despising those people), or there’s the spiritually shallow, those too loud, too unfriendly, the people we didn’t think we needed to encounter again. Think about them. There are so many potential blocks right now to communion between us – not just the quarantine. But

these people too have been missing Jesus in the Eucharist and are worth missing and loving. Today we are once more in their presence.

But, even more important for us in light of the Trinity we celebrate today, I think there is also an opportunity here to increase our communion with Jesus. You are here today, outside in a parking lot under questionable conditions, perhaps wondering if the person next to you is asymptomatic . . . because you want communion with Jesus. Let that thought and desire grow. We're once more in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist – together. That is the summit of human communion. What a blessing this is.

Ultimately only a life in God is living in Real Life. Let us not waste this time. Let us allow our longing for Jesus and all His people, and our communion with them, to add to their value in our hearts. It's not the nature of Jesus' people to be isolated from one another. When we once again can all be worshipping inside the church, please come to mass -- all the time -- or we'll miss you.

