TODAY . . . YOU are the sermon. Anything I say here is icing on the cake, at best. Rather like Saint Francis’s admonition to preach the gospel always and, when necessary, to use words.

TODAY you are the flesh-and-blood testimony to that wonderful second line in today’s Collect, in which we pray:

Mercifully give us faith to perceive that, according to [Jesus’] promise, he abides with his Church . . . to the end of the ages.

The most remarkable three words are “faith to perceive.” It reminds us that we do not have to invoke Jesus’ or God’s presence in order for that to happen. Over and over we are assured that when two or three are gathered in his Name he is present with us. We pray for God to help us perceive that, to know that, deep in our being.

We are the sermon because our being together for these 14 months has been mostly by remote, seeing each other’s images on our phones and computer screens. Even those images have been reminders that we are truly together in heart and soul even when it has been impossible to do this, what we are doing right now. We have received grace to perceive Christ’s presence within and among us this whole time.

The Sunday after the Ascension seems the perfect occasion to resume gathering together in this sacred place. Jesus was raised up into heaven in order to be over all people, all things. He blessed those who were present and told them, even as he was ascending, that they no longer had to be in the physical presence of this one human man (even God incarnate) in order for him to be present with them. The message obtains today, 2,000 years later.

He also told them that the Holy Spirit was coming to them soon (and we celebrate that occasion next Sunday) to help them as they struggled with this new reality, of his physical absence. Having the Holy Spirit with you is having me with you, he assured them.

And we might add—to give us faith to perceive that he is with us, to the ends of the earth, to the end of the ages.

And now, today, at long last once again, we have that assurance made tangible and the real presence brought home to us in the blessed sacrament of the Body of Christ in Holy Communion. We, the Body of Christ, receive the Body of Christ, by God’s sheer grace and love.

You are the sermon, preaching that faith by your very presence in this Church of the Epiphany, both here in this beautiful, familiar place and in the homes of those who are joining us in their homes.

+ + +