

# Abide in Christ

## Live in the Present with Awe and Gratitude



Archbishop John C. Wester

**H**ave you ever been in an elevator with someone who is talking on his or her cell phone? It is a bit awkward, is it not? It is not only that you do not want to listen in on their conversation (or maybe you do!). Rather, you might have the sense that you do not matter; it is as if you are invisible. In our fast-paced, technological world,

it seems that presence is diminishing more and more each day. Maybe it is for this reason that as I tour the archdiocese during the Easter Season I enjoy hearing the names of the confirmation candidates called out one by one and hearing them respond, "present". They are not wearing ear buds, they are not rushing off to a class, they are not talking on their cell phones and they are not engrossed in a computer game. They stand there for all in the church to see and make their presence felt in anticipation of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit whom God the Father makes present through His only begotten Son. More and more, I am coming to view the sacrament of confirmation as a sacrament of presence.

This idea of presence is

certainly part of the divine plan. God loves us so much that He seeks to be present to us in a concrete, tangible way. He yearns to get our attention, to grab us by the shoulders and say, "I am. I am here. I am present to you." Through the Incarnation, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity became one of us in the person of Jesus Christ. God took on our lowly flesh so that we can hear the words of Jesus, feel His healing touch, and see His crucified body given up for us. And Jesus promised to be with us always until the end of the age. He did not leave us orphaned at the Ascension. No, He sent the Holy Spirit so that His presence can be keenly felt for all time. Day in and day out, Jesus invites us to be present to Him just as He is present to us.

As Catholics, we are

called not only to be present to the ever-present God, but through our baptisms and confirmations we are called to be present to one another. Indeed, through the sacraments of initiation we form the body of Christ. To be present to one another is to be present to God and God to us. And yet, being present to one another is not easy. And it is not simply because of smart phones. It also has to do with selfishness, ego, carelessness, life's many distractions, greed and so many other sins. Jesus knew how difficult it is for us to be truly present to one another and so He sent the Holy Spirit, not only that we might experience His presence, but that we might also be more present to each other.

The oil of chrism, which is used to anoint



the foreheads of the confirmandi, symbolizes the many ways that the Holy Spirit assists us in our relationships with one another. To bring this point home, I often remind the confirmation candidates about the very practical example of how oil works in the engine of a car. Just as the oil helps to lubricate the metal parts and keep them operating smoothly, so too does the Holy Spirit reduce the friction that often characterizes our relationships with each other. Just as the engine oil cools the engine, so does the Holy Spirit cool our tempers which seem so prone to road rage and to taking offense at the slightest offense. And just as the oil of the engine cleanses it of the fine metal shavings, so too does the Holy Spirit cleanse us of our sins, helping us to grow closer to one another and to deepen the bonds that unite us.

Being present to one another is not easy. It takes wisdom to appreciate that

our faith is not simply a set of rules and regulations, but a living and dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ and with our brothers and sisters in Christ. It takes prudence to know when to be silent and when to speak, when to criticize and when to build up, when to engage and when to walk away. It takes courage to say I'm sorry, to admit mistakes or to tell somebody that I love him or her. It takes wonder and awe to recognize that being in the presence of God or of another person is the most precious gift that life has to offer. The gifts of the Holy Spirit, then, enable us to go out of ourselves and to become selfless, to put others first and to recognize that if I want to gain my life, I must lose it. Or, to put it more colloquially, to come to the realization that the takers eat well and the givers sleep well.

One of my favorite quotes goes something like this: "Do not live in the past with guilt or in the future with fear, but in the present



with awe and gratitude." Maybe that is why they call it the present: the gift we give one another is to be present in the now moment. Sometimes people feel awkward because they do not know what to say to a friend or family member in a tough situation. But in reality, this is not a problem. Just being present is what counts. That is why Jesus gives us His real presence

and sends us forth to be really present to each other. In the Eucharist, we find the strength we need to stand up and be counted – to be present.  
Sincerely Yours in the Risen Lord

*John C. Wester*

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*Archbishop John C. Wester presents confirmandi of St. John Vianney, Rio Rancho with pastor Scott Mansfield.*