

None of us lives for himself. If we live, we live for the Lord

I have friends who have been married for many years. They are very faithful to each other and to their relationship with the Lord. On their wedding day they exchanged rings that were inscribed, "Mike and Kathy in Christ." I know that they have tried to live that reality in their lives and in their marriage. They live for the Lord.

What does it mean to be "in Christ"? Outside of the saints, we all stumble and fall at times. None of us lives this perfectly as Christians. The monk Thomas Merton remarked in his book, *The Sign of Jonas*, that on the day he was ordained a priest he realized that he was giving only a fraction of himself to God. From his perspective, much of his self-centeredness, pride and sinfulness remained.

So what does it mean? In this brief essay I would like to offer an example of what it means to be "in" something, explore what "in Christ" means and finally share the tradition of the Catholic Church that offers us a way to grow in Christ.

Let's begin with the first challenge. What does it mean to be "in Christ"? This is a term that is rooted in the sacramental gift of Baptism. In the early church, when converts were baptized, they stepped into a large baptismal font. The waters of that font represented Christ himself, who is the living water, promised in the Gospel of John. In other words, they were "in Christ". From that point on, they were to live within the Body of Christ.

From a secular perspective we can be immersed in other values. In some families we are immersed in music. In others, we might be immersed in a sport or activity.

In our experience, perhaps it is more practical to say that Christ is to live in us. He is present within us. If we can use an analogy, I suspect many of us know individuals whose identity is wrapped up, in a healthy way, in their work or vocation. I know someone who served for many years with the fire department. He was rightly proud of that service. He also was an individual who raised a family and enjoyed other aspects of life. Nonetheless, the values he lived such as service, community, and loyalty were part of his being. If on vacation he saw a car on the side of the road, he would stop to see if they needed help. He taught firefighting classes in college. Because he had EMT training he would offer assistance if

someone fell or passed out wherever he was. For him, firefighting was more than a job, it was a vocation.

If we are “in Christ”, then Jesus becomes “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” for us. This relationship must impact our family life, our values, our prayer life, and our desire to be with the Lord. Jesus shows us the way to be faithful in marriage, loving as parents, and neighborly to both friend and stranger. When we are in Christ, he leads and we follow. This is because we know he has redeemed us and he loves us.

For each individual this might be experienced differently. We all share a common mission which is to bring Christ’s love to others. Yet we have our own ministries, depending on our life situation. For some, this might mean a call to a specific vocation within the church. These would include those called to priesthood, diaconate, consecrated life or full-time lay ministry. For most, it is experienced in living out their daily lives. Saint Paul’s description of the Body of Christ in *1 Corinthians*, gives a great example of this.

This living within Christ also includes spiritual development. We grow into the relationship, even as we should be growing in every love relationship in our lives.

For example, I often think of my father as living in Christ. He probably would not agree as he was a humble man. He was a lifelong Catholic. During World War II he began going to daily Mass praying for his brother who was serving overseas. My father had polio as a child and could not serve. After the war he continued this habit of daily Mass until the day he passed away. He especially had an appreciation of Christ in the Eucharist. My father’s normal family life included saying grace before meals, trying to help his neighbor, and in retirement, volunteering at the local Catholic school distributing lunches on Monday. None of it was profound, but together he imparted a relationship with Christ to my sister and me. What most struck me growing up was my father’s honesty. He would never steal and never lie. I always remember that. His relationship with Christ was the center of his life which revolved around those whom he loved.

As Catholics we are blessed because we have so many ways of opening ourselves up to Jesus. These are found in the wisdom and tradition of the church.

- **Sunday Mass** This is Christ's special gift to us. We will grow in knowing Jesus in the manner we attend to his presence in the Scriptures and in the Eucharist.

- **Examples of the Saints** Our Church has saints for every occasion and faith filled journey. Knowing their stories and their struggles help us with our own.

- **Teachings of Christ.** Can you name the most important teaching of Jesus in your life? Can you name the most challenging teachings? If not, read the Gospels to grow in knowledge of the Savior.

- **Opportunities to Serve Those in Need.** This is a two-fold blessing. When we serve our neighbor we are serving Jesus himself and we are also being Christ for others.

- **Other Sacraments.** Every sacrament is an encounter with Jesus. In Reconciliation for example, we encounter his mercy. In the Anointing of the Sick we encounter his healing.

- **Devotions, Retreats, Days of Recollection.** All of these are offered to us so that we can meet the Lord.

Christ Has No Body

Christ has no body now but yours,
 No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
 Yours are the eyes with which He looks
 Compassion on this world,
 Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good,
 Yours are the hands, with which He blesses all the world.
 Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
 Yours are the eyes, you are His body.

Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

These are the words of the great saint, Teresa of Jesus. They are true
when Christ dwells in us and we in him.