

Earlier this year, while in Sydney for our Provincial chapter, I stayed in one of our student houses. There, in the dining room, I saw the painting you can see on the screen right now. It's a painting of a very youthful Mary, entering the home of Elizabeth, and Elizabeth in utter surprise calls out: "It's you!!", and then adds the words we heard in today's Gospel: "The child in my womb leapt for joy", for somehow the as yet unborn John the Baptist had recognised the presence of Christ in Mary's womb.

And in some way the same should be happening to or in each one of us when we meet one another. Where we believe that Christ is present in each one of us, the moment we cross the threshold of anyone's consciousness, something of that person should leap up within us for joy at the presence of Christ. Every time two people united in grace meet with each other, something in each other should cry out: "Who am I that the bearer of the living Body of my Lord should come to me?"

It is our faith that Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, has taken flesh in each one of us. He did not just take flesh as a baby while we were still in the womb; instead he said to each one of us at our Baptism: "Give me your body. Let me join myself to you to continue my human presence, my human ministry on earth in partnership with you. I want to make your body my Body, your psychology my psychology, your character and temperament, my character and temperament, your background and history, my background and history. I want to be in you – in you and with you – to be what you are. And I want you to be what I am. Give me your body and be my Body, my human presence on earth." In itself, this union with Christ in grace, is greater than just being physically the mother of God.

The thing we find hardest to believe about the Incarnation is that it continues. God was not made flesh in Jesus for just thirty-three years, never to be humanly present in the world again. The mystery, the wonder, and the joy of God's coming to be humanly present to us is - that he still is.

Jesus was not 'Emmanuel – God with us' for just a short while in Palestine. He is still Emmanuel, still God and still humanly present with us. We can meet him humanly, hear his human words, feel his human touch, deal with him as a human being, just as truly as we deal with one another. And as we do this, the grace of his human presence in the world continues for us.

But we have to believe in that presence. The infant in Elisabeth's womb leapt for joy because her faith recognised the presence of Jesus in Mary. And unless we consciously recognise in faith the presence of Jesus in the words Scripture, in the words of the Mass, in the words of absolution in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in the words others speak to us as the expression of graced love, and in all the graced human words and gestures of the Church, – that are the continuing ministry of Jesus in his Body on earth, then our hearts will not leap up. We will not recognise the human presence of Jesus in our midst, and we will not find joy in God our Saviour as we should.

This is the good news of Jesus the Saviour: Because God took flesh in Jesus and became a human being in our midst, we can still encounter him and deal with him humanly today. In his Church, Jesus is still 'Emmanuel', the saving presence of God humanly and active in our world.

How do we experience his human divine presence in our own lives? The first step is to believe. We have to work at being conscious that Jesus himself is speaking to us through the Scriptures, through the words of the Mass, through the sacrament of Reconciliation, through the Anointing of the Sick, through the graced words and actions of those with which we deal. We have to believe in his human presence in order to recognise and experience it.

Secondly, we have to make a positive point of dealing humanly with Jesus ourselves. We have to spend time with him in the way we do with our friends, think about his words as we think about the words of anyone who is important to us, see him in imagination doing the things he did on earth, and do concrete physical things ourselves to show him our love. In short, treat him as truly human as Mary, Elizabeth and the infant in her womb did. Have a thoughtful day!.