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## INTRODUCTION

“And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (Jn1:14). This is how God ultimately made His intimate presence among us — He became like us and really lived among us. But how far has this endearment of God been appreciated or at least experienced by His people?

A French missionary priest imparted to us young university students in his talks and in some of his homilies the reality and concreteness of God’s presence in our lives. In relation to the great mystery of Jesus’ Real Presence in the Eucharist, he emphasized to us the big difference between “real” presence and “mere” presence by citing different day-to-day experiences that demonstrate the two. The former is illustrated in the case of friends who meet and interact and have a personal connection that affects the parties at that very particular moment. The parties are nourished with such an encounter; hence, their presence is very real. The latter’s classic example is that of an elevator ride where people usually have no interaction whatsoever despite their being in the same place at the same time. There is lack of person-to-person connections—as if the people around them are non-existent. Recently, however, we came across an interesting exception that was featured in the news, that of the SM elevator girl who made a difference by showing how it is *to be truly present* inside an elevator. She became an instant celebrity.

Most of us also tend to falter from being truly present to others around us because of various reasons, such as time, health, location, and so on. But real presence goes beyond the limits of time, health, and place, as shown by a concrete example of the almost eighty-year-old Pope Francis, a native of Argentina and now residing in Rome as its Bishop and Pope of the universal Church. In his pastoral visit to the typhoon-devastated Tacloban, Leyte, he lovingly told the people there just as heavy rains were pouring down, “I am late but now I am here.” This imprinted an indelible mark in the hearts of Filipinos not only in Tacloban but also those scattered in the rest of the world. These events which took place in my lifetime make me wonder with awe and reverence —the abiding presence of God in our lives must be similar to what the Pope showed us... even far beyond it. This impression is highlighted more when we go deeper and wider in assessing our present world where violence and greed seem to triumph and, thus, people are asking, “Where is God in all of this?”

As revealed to us in Scripture and Tradition, we learn that God reaches out to humanity all the time to be always present with us. A classic example of this are the religious experiences of the chosen people of God. And up until now, we can and are still experiencing this “presence.” I can claim this in my personal life and it must be very true also to the life of all the faithful and even to all of humanity. As social beings, all of us need this kind of abiding presence. Personally, I started with having a life-changing experience of Jesus’ Real Eucharistic Presence and eventually realized that, as I am going through my religious and priestly-academic formation, the Loving God really “intends” to establish with His people and with all creation His Abiding Presence manifested and revealed in various ways. God’s Self-Revelation is manifesting to us that everything begins from the “fruitful encounter” of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity and ends with the “loving communion” of all creation with the same Triune God. From this movement flows my discussion of this synthesis: I will start with God’s Creative Presence, proceed to His Salvific Presence, and finally discuss His Sanctifying Presence that nourishes and sustains the life and guides the path of the pilgrim Church.

In *Chapter One*, I will be discussing God’s “plan of sheer goodness” which is founded on the real encounter that is happening in the Holy Trinity *ad intra*, which in man’s limited capacity

is described as love. This real encounter for me is an example *par excellence* of what “being really present” is to “the other.” From this interaction among the Three Divine Persons comes Creation, which is considered to be the overflowing love of the Holy Trinity. In creation, man and woman become the closest to God as they are the only creatures made in His image and likeness. Humanity then becomes attuned with the presence of a loving and faithful God. However, the first man and woman faltered and fell. Due to their unfaithfulness they eluded God’s presence. God, who is “rich in mercy and full of compassion,” in his faithfulness, promised them His saving presence. This promise would eventually become His covenant with them. It serves as His constant invitation of His creative presence and it is characterized by the coming together of God and His people and the renewal of all creation.

In *Chapter Two*, I will be discussing God’s salvific presence. At this point, I shall be underlining the ultimate act of God’s love, as He somehow stripped Himself of His glory by sharing in our humanity. Starting from the Incarnation — the Son of God born in the likeness of man—as the final covenantal presence of God, I shall proceed to the public ministry of Jesus as the liberating presence of God, and then to the Paschal Mystery as Christ’s redeeming presence in the whole world.

In *Chapter Three*, the discussion shall be centered on the sanctifying presence of God. Here, I will focus on the work of the Holy Spirit as the Lord, the giver of life, and the advocate. Then I will show how the Church and the Sacraments serve as the Spirit’s means of sanctifying man and creation. We shall see as well how God has been present to Mary as one who is part of the Church and instrumental to the salvific plan of God. Finally, I will expound on the “life in the Spirit,” which is man’s vocation in the presence of God. This discusses the kind of “relationship” and “way of life” that is demanded from those who profess belief in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As the Church is on its pilgrimage here on earth toward the Kingdom of God, she is mandated by the Lord Jesus Christ to propagate that authentic love and peace which He freely gives to all. In other words, it becomes her mission to be the herald of God’s “abiding presence” in the world.

## CONCLUSION

“And behold I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). This was the promise of our Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples after commissioning them to go and make disciples of all nations. It is indeed a very encouraging promise of presence which we know and believe to be real and truthful. It becomes our source of hope as we continue in our journey of life.

In the beginning of this synthesis, I mentioned that in the face of turmoil, violence, and miseries confronting our world today, we are somehow bewildered. As we perceive it, this atmosphere seems to paint an image of absence, an experience of something or someone that is lacking. Many questions puzzle our probing minds. But ultimately, we reach the point of asking about our faith. As our place of solace, we go to the Church and ask, “God, where are you? Where are you when the unborn children cry desperately for help during abortion; when terrorists attack innocent people and claim their lives; when people’s lives, men and women, young and old, are claimed by ravaging typhoons and strong earthquakes; when people die of cancer and other terminal diseases; when people are killed because of their religion and race; when young people kill themselves out of despair and loneliness?” Indeed, more and more questions could be added to the list.

This synthesis does not delve into answering all these questions. Rather, I am pointing out here that maybe we ask the wrong questions from the very start. Is God really absent in all these or maybe it is we who are blinded from recognizing His very presence?

Going through the tenets of our Catholic Faith that deals with the loving plan of salvation that God has for us, I now appreciate more the truth that He did not forsake us even for a split second. Even before time began, God in His goodness already planned something good for us and that is to make us share in His “image and likeness.” It means that we are meant to be with Him, who is infinitely good, for all eternity. In fact, He offered it to us on His own initiative. Unfortunately, it is man who turned down the offer from the start—that very instance when the world turned upside down for unfaithful humanity. But again, thanks be to God, He sent us His Son to regain back what is rightfully ours from the start. Through Him and in the Spirit, we are made adopted children of the Father, destined to be with the Triune God for all eternity at the end of the ages. Indeed, the loving presence of God never left us even for a single moment. But it is we who, from time to time, evade this presence. In fact, as always, we are reminded by God through the Church that, “in the fullness of time, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that we might receive adoption” and as proof of our being his children, “God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” (Gal 4:4–6).

We are truly His and God did not spare any moment to claim us as His own. The challenge is here with us now, whether we too are as mindful as He is of our being His children and thus of His presence in us. Only through our constant awareness of Him as our loving, faithful, merciful, and compassionate God can we truly experience His redeeming and abiding presence that fills our lives with hope and joy as we journey to eternal life.

Indeed, God’s presence has been with His people in many forms, such as “clouds by day and fire by night” during the exodus from Egypt, in the Ark of the Covenant, with the prophets, and so on. Above all, He sent his Son to the world, to be the Emmanuel, God with us.

Now as a Church, the mystical body of His Son, it becomes our duty and responsibility to witness and live out this loving presence of God especially in our love for the Eucharist, and in being Eucharistic persons as well. In this way, the truth will be proclaimed all over the world that truly He is with us, became like us, and lived among us through Jesus Christ, His Son, as John’s Gospel would say, “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (Jn 1:14).