

To the person who took our seat at church on Easter Sunday

On Easter morning we arrived at church about 10 minutes before Mass and headed toward our usual seats.

That's when we realized our pew was full. There you were.

I didn't recognize you and your family. In fact, as we walked through the church, we saw many unfamiliar faces. And we realized that every seat was taken.



For a second, I'll admit, I was disappointed. We would have to take our children to the Mass in the school gym. It's harder to keep them still and focused there, and it's not the church where we've been traveling on our Lenten journey.

But as we headed toward the church doors to leave, I glanced around at the sea of faces. And I thought about what a special moment this must be for people who don't do this every week. You came extra early. You made sure everyone was meticulously dressed.

Maybe you hadn't been in the church last week or the week before. Maybe you can't remember the last time you came for Easter. Maybe you didn't make it to Christmas Mass either. But something made you want to be here to celebrate with us.

Welcome home. There's plenty of room. Thank you for joining us! We're happy you're here.

I hope you felt welcome by the people around you. More than that, I hope you felt Jesus' presence. I hope your heart leapt while singing "Alleluia." I hope you felt the thrill of the new holy water, the glow of the Easter fire in the candles, and the magnificence of the miracle of the bread and wine becoming Jesus' body and blood in the Eucharist—just as it did at the Last Supper.



Aren't we so, so blessed to be able to come together and celebrate the Mass? Our church can never be too crowded. And you are, of course, not at all a stranger. You are a member of the

Body of Christ.

As my family and I walked to the gym and found a seat up near the front, surrounded by friends and familiar smiles, I kept thinking of you. We had a beautiful Mass and Jesus was with us, just as He was with you in the actual church.

I hope you didn't just feel warmly welcomed and included and wanted by us and our fellow parishioners. I hope you felt Jesus inviting you to come home.

Easter Mass is beautiful. The music and the newness and the alleluias and the excitement of a church bursting at the seams. But you know what's just as amazing?

Lent. Advent. Pentecost. Divine Mercy Sunday—which is next week. Ordinary Time.

In fact, we celebrate Mass every single day of the year—except Good Friday. And there is a beauty, a love, a joy you just can't find anywhere else.

So I hope we'll see you next week. In fact, if you don't mind a little squirming, some loud whispering, and a few rolling crayons, we'll even save you a seat in our pew.

