

## SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

*Gospel: John 14:23-29*

Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe."

### REFLECTION 1:

### PEACE/SHALOM!

In the first line in today's Gospel, Jesus says that if we love him, then we will keep his word (John 14: 23-29). That may be a tall order, since keeping our own word is hard enough. Napoleon said it well when he advised: 'The best way to keep one's word is not to give it'. But today's Gospel challenges us to do more than give a quick response – keeping our word is a lifetime action. The Gospel also reminds us that if we do keep Jesus' word, then the Father will love us and dwell within us,

Jesus wanted to make provision for his followers so that when he was lifted up – first in suffering and then in glory - they would be able to continue his ministry. Peace and the Advocate were the provisions Jesus made. In the lengthy last conversation of the fourth Gospel the Evangelist John has ably described Jesus' gifts of peace and the Spirit in a manner that continues to teach and encourage believers. Peace or Shalom was the traditional greeting our Jewish ancestors used to wish one another well. The greeting 'Shalom' has a ring of yearning for another, all that is necessary for their fulfilment in life. It is not merely the cessation of war or even a temporary truce, but rather a prayer that the very presence of God would reign in the human breast. Shalom or Peace began to be associated with the era of the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus was now imparting this peace to his own, once his hour had come – through his hour of passion, suffering, death and glory, the era of salvation had arrived. St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, while celebrating what Jesus accomplished, declares him to be 'our peace'.

Like the gift of peace, John assigns the title Advocate (one who pleads for another) as Jesus' gift of the Spirit. The Advocate is Jesus' abiding gift to his Church. This Spirit would be sent by the Father in Jesus' name, just as Jesus himself was sent by the Father. This advocate would continue to be the abiding presence of the Risen Christ with his disciples. Just as Jesus guided his own in the truth, so would the Advocate continue the education of Jesus' followers. He would also remind them of all that Jesus had said. We as Jesus' disciples in the world are counselled to witness, to listen and serve.

St. Patrick many centuries ago understood this great mystery. He wrote a prayer for protection. This prayer speaks of our desire to be surrounded by God,

'Be above me, as high as the noonday sun.

Be below me, the rock I set my feet upon.

Be beside me, the wind on my right and left.

Be behind me, circle me with your truth and light'.

Let us ask Patrick to intercede for us, to grant us peace and a vibrant understanding of the gift of the Trinity, our three in one God who is always with us.

## **REFLECTION 2: WITH AND WITHIN US TODAY**

The late Johnny Carson played a character known as 'Carnac the Magnificent' on the 'Tonight Show'. Now, Carnac's role was to provide the answers to questions held in a sealed envelope before they were ever asked. In today's Gospel Jesus tells his disciples things before they happen. He predicts for instance, that his disciples will let him down but that they will recover. 'Now, I tell you this' he says, 'before it happens'. Earlier Jesus answered them, 'I have told you this while I am with you, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I told you'. Because Jesus will always be with us, he tells us not to be troubled or afraid. 'Peace, I leave you, my peace I give you' (Jn 14: 23-29).

The followers of Jesus in the early Christian communities had to deal with the stark facts as they unfolded. The apostles, the eye-witnesses of Jesus, were gradually passing on, most were now dead or soon would be. Christianity was growing beyond Palestine and indeed was extending to 'the ends of the Earth'. Now heretics and phoney teachers threatened the unity of the community and the integrity of the faith.

Everyday they had to adapt to ever-changing times and circumstances and so they had to lean heavily on the presence of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus assured them would be their guide. This Spirit, the Paraclete, Advocate, can be thought of as 'the post-resurrection presence of Jesus' with his own. For instance, Luke's narration in today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles hints at these early believers' struggle to come to grips with the disagreements between Jewish and Gentile Christians over the necessity of maintaining Jewish feasts, purification rituals and dietary laws. He admits that these gave rise to 'no little dissertation and debate'. Indeed, these were issues that, if left unresolved could have stifled the growth of the new-born Church. The early Christians would have to work together, in faith under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had assured his disciples and all who would follow him, that they would have to work together in faith under the auspices of the Holy Spirit. How, all that Jesus had done while with his own, the Advocate would now do as tutor, teacher and guide. The Advocate would not allow them to forget Jesus' sayings. They would be kept aware of those values and principles that were to guide and inspire their faithful followers of their Lord.

As we continue to live within the same interim period between Jesus' coming on Earth, we may very well ask what lesson is the Advocate, the Holy Spirit holding out for us that we can make our own? Perhaps it is simply the renewed realisation that the Spirit sent by the Father in Jesus' name continues to live and breathe and move among us in these times.

Wasn't the spirit at work when delegates in the Sistine Chapel surprised the Church and the world by electing Jorge Bergoglio as our next Pope? And when that Argentine cardinal announced that his name as Bishop of Rome would be 'Francis' - surely that too was the Holy Spirit setting the tone for a humbler, simpler papacy allied towards the poor. Isn't the Spirit also speaking through Malala, the young Pakistani advocate for women's rights who was shot but not silenced?

This same spirit begs for your voice and mine. That same Spirit was present with Peter, James, Paul, Mary and John, and is present with and within us today.