

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Gospel: John 14:15-21

Jesus said to his disciples:

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

REFLECTION 1: THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR LIVES

Several years ago a missionary in China built a small church for his Christian community. On the inside wall of the church he drew a huge triangle to symbolise the Holy Trinity. Then in the first corner of the triangle he drew an eye, symbolising God the Father. In the second corner he drew a cross symbol of Jesus Christ, God the Son. Then in the third corner he drew a dove symbolising God the Holy Spirit. After he had finished the drawing, an elderly Chinese lady came up to him and said 'Honorable Father and his eye I understand; honorable Son and his cross, I understand, he died on the cross for us, but honorable Holy Spirit and his bird, I do not understand.

I think a lot of us are like that woman; we are a little hazy about the role of the Holy Spirit. So, let's take a glance at how the Scriptures describe the Spirit's role in the overall divine plan. Today's Gospel (John 14: 15-21) is taken from Jesus' farewell to his disciples. It is very intimate in tone and it touches on four themes. Jesus' legacy to his disciples and us is the teaching he has left us, his commandments - and so today's Gospel begins with a plea that we keep these. The second theme is a word of encouragement to do our best to keep Jesus' spirit alive among us. The Spirit he leaves us is not just pleasant memories that inspire us. This Spirit of Jesus will remain with us as a new form of presence - the Paraclete - translated as 'advocate' or 'comforter' – someone we can call to our aid, a friend who would be prepared to give evidence on our behalf, someone who will bring consolation and support to those who are downhearted. The Spirit that Jesus gives will never desert us. We will never be alone – the Spirit of Truth will be our constant companion and like the word of Jesus, the Paraclete will abide with us, especially in tough times when our faith is put to the test. The third theme is Jesus' reassurance to us that he will not leave us orphans. Even though the world believes he died, his risen presence will remain with us, not less real by not being visible to our eyes. The fourth theme is that the revelation of Jesus has not ceased because he is no longer physically with us. The future will bring fresh challenges to us. But if we continue to remain united with Jesus and through him to the Father, he will continue to make himself known to us in many new ways.

With Jesus' teaching about the Paraclete we are already looking forward to the Feast of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is often called the forgotten member of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is Jesus' farewell gift to us. In baptism we are all bonded to Jesus, to one another and to the Holy Trinity. In the words of the Creed, the Spirit is referred to as 'the giver of life'. This is the mystery we are preparing to celebrate in two weeks' time.

REFLECTION 2:

A REASON TO HOPE

One hears to-day of those who for one reason or another have ceased to practice their faith. Perhaps some are still wounded by recent scandals within the Church. Others among us may be attempting to give it another shot when the time comes to hand on the faith to our children, the faith that our parents once shared with us. Some of those earliest believers had the joy of knowing Jesus and were convinced that he was indeed sent by God for the salvation of human kind. These had the courage to remain even after he was handed over and suffered and died. They believed that he was risen and present to them through the power of his promised spirit.

Others believed and committed themselves to Jesus and the Church based on the compelling testimony of eye-witnesses to the Christ-event. As to-day's first reading attests, the witness of these earlier believers was so effective that the community soon grew beyond Jerusalem to Samaria. This development produced great joy. No doubt the spirit of joy was contagious and others who witnessed it wanted to discover its source so as to share in the experience. People admired their daring to continue preaching even when threatened by the authorities. Perhaps in their wonder onlookers were prompted to listen and in their listening they too began to believe.

The early believers in Jesus possessed another gift that recommended them and their message to their contemporaries – they had hope. In to-day's second reading the author of 1 Peter encouraged readers to be ready to explain the reason for their hope. That reason was, and always will be, the person of Jesus Christ, who has loved us and made himself known to us (John 14: 15-21). In the strength of their love and in the power of his presence, we have hope, despite the wars that continue to wrack this planet with pain and grief, despite the calamities of nature, despite the diseases that defy any attempt at a cure, despite the poverty. Despite all those whose sorry lot attests to the weakness of our efforts, we have a living, breathing, loving and caring reason to hope. The witness of our hope can speak louder than any evil and truer than any grief until the One who is our hope comes again. The Spirit is Jesus' gift, by which we continue to witness to the world and when we are asked for the reason for our joy, our love, our faith, our hope, the answer will always be the same. His name is Jesus. Patrick Kavanagh, poet of Inniskeen, penned it so well. He wrote:

Don't fear, don't fear, I said to my soul:
The Bedlam of Time is an empty bucket rattled.
'Tis you who will say in the end who best battles.
Only they who fly home to God have flown at all'.