

6th Sunday of Easter, 17 May 2020

Gospel: John 14: 15-21

Homily: Fr. Ken

Today's Gospel takes us back to the scene of the Last Supper. It is Jesus' farewell conversation with his beloved disciples.

Jesus' heart is filled with fear and foreboding: in just a few hours' time, he will face the most gruesome of fates—death by crucifixion.

And yet his thoughts are centered not on himself but on his disciples, "my friends", as he calls them. He knows how devastating his death will be for them, how lonely and vulnerable they will feel without his visible presence. And so he reassures them with the promise, "I will not leave you orphans", and says, "I shall ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever".

The Greek word for "advocate" is rich in meaning: a comforter, a consoler, a counsellor. Jesus has been all of these to his friends, and now he assures them that someone will continue in his place. This special helper, a joint gift of Father and Son, is of course the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love and truth; the Spirit who, as love, is at the heart of the Church; the Spirit who, as truth, enables us to remain firm in the truths of our faith despite the many pressures we face in a secular and materialistic daily life.

Today's other readings, from the Acts of the Apostles and from the First Letter of St. Peter, give us glimpses of the Holy Spirit in action. In the first reading the Spirit enables Philip to proclaim, to announce fearlessly, the good news of Jesus Christ to the people of Samaria. And then, through the coming of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of confirmation, the newly baptized are strengthened in their faith and their desire to share it with others. We read that

there was “great rejoicing”. Joy is one of the special gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The second reading suggests that gentleness accompanies the gift of joy. St. Peter says we ought to be ready to offer an explanation to those who enquire about “the hope” that is ours as Christians, but he insists it must be done gently, always “with courtesy and respect”.

Many years ago, Pope Paul VI was asked: “What is the greatest need of the Church today?” Without hesitation he replied: “The Holy Spirit”. That need has not diminished with the passing decades.

The word “Advocate” used by Jesus to describe the Holy Spirit, literally means: *someone called in*.

It has been wisely said that the Holy Spirit seldom gatecrashes: the Spirit normally waits to be called in, waits to be invited.

These final few weeks before Pentecost, the feast of the Holy Spirit, are the ideal time for us to offer the invitation, praying earnestly that we may be ever more richly blessed with the Holy Spirit and the Spirit’s gifts of love and joy and power and gentleness.

Of course, the Holy Spirit has been with us since Baptism. What we are really praying for, then, is that we may open our hearts and respond ever more generously to our divine guest. In that way, we shall be renewed as individuals, as St. Rita parishioners, and as the Church worldwide.

Jesus was anxious that his friends should not feel isolated and alone. We today are his friends too. Why then would we want to think of ourselves as alone? We are not alone. We can experience the loving support of the Holy Spirit who is, in the words of the well-known hymn, the “best gift of God above”.