

6th Sunday Easter A (John 14:15-21)

Our Gospel today is part of the farewell address that Jesus made to his friends on the eve of his death. They had become the closest of friends. He loved them and they loved him very deeply. Their lives were linked together by mutual respect, trust, acceptance, and devotion. But that close relationship would by all appearances be destroyed. Jesus would be arrested and most of his friends would abandon him, deny him or forsake him. Jesus knew this and he wanted to spend his remaining time to bid his friends a fond farewell.

Saying goodbye to a friend is most difficult. As Shakespeare said, "Parting is such sweet sorrow." Grief is often mingled with other feelings, denial (This can't be happening), anger, turning into depression.

Fear of abandonment is probably one of the most prevalent fears in our world today. All of us have experienced some, or many losses in our lives; losses of loved ones, marriage partners, children, parents, close friends. Many of the engaged couples I have counseled often fear the commitment of marriage because of the losses they have experienced in the families they came from. In my ministry with divorced men and women, they often struggle with that fear of abandonment. Few of us escape that fear for we have all had losses in our lives.

And so the friends of Jesus were abandoned by him at his death. They were left behind. After a few exciting weeks and a few brief appearances after his resurrection, he left them never to be seen again in this life. What changed their sense of separation was the fulfillment of the promise that Jesus made in today's Gospel, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of Truth who remains with us." "I will not leave you orphans."

The Spirit did indeed come and took up right where Jesus had left off. He wasn't visible and tangible as Jesus had been. The disciples had to get used to that. It required another way of thinking. They had to learn to listen with their hearts as well as their ears. They made the adjustment and soon came to realize that Jesus had not abandoned them. He was as much with them as he had ever been with one significant difference. This time he would never leave them. Like those early disciples, who had to learn a new way of listening, listening with the heart, so must we learn this new way to be aware of the constant presence of Jesus in his Holy Spirit. Another name for the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, is "the friend who will never leave us." And so we remember Him who feeds us with his very self on our journey of faith.

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