

6 Easter Yr A, 29/05/2011
Jn 14:15-21
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“I will not leave you orphaned”

Have you ever felt abandoned, forlorn, left all alone, like an orphan? Many, I think, do feel this way. You, like me, have probably heard of tragic stories that go something like this: Man meets woman. They court each other for a time. Fall in love, get engaged, and marry. Time passes. One or more children become members of the family. Then one day, the husband is inflicted with an incurable cancer. The wife is disappointed, and never, in her worst-case scenario expectations, thought that her husband would get cancer. She feels that he has failed her and her children. So, without warning, the wife moves with her children to another province abandoning her husband—never to see him again, leaving him to face his suffering and death alone.

Or, again, you may have heard or known of a story that goes something like this: Woman has grown to a ripe old age of 95 years. She still lives in her own home. The home is a small, one bedroom, rundown shack. The roof leaks. The windows are not airtight and the furnace is old, running on its last leg. It is almost as freezing cold inside as it is outside. Yet, the woman is fiercely independent and stoic about her situation. She has outlived her husband now by 25 years. They had no children. She and her husband were both only children—so she has no brothers or sisters. By now, all of her friends have died. She feels that she has to face her world each day all alone.

I think there are many people all over the world, and right here in this community—in many and various circumstances—who feel and are living with the reality of being abandoned, forlorn, left all alone, or like an orphan. Such a feeling and way of living is sad, and at

times, even tragic. Such feelings and ways of living, I think are what Jesus refers to in today's gospel when he speaks of the world without God or hostile to God.

Over against a life without God and hostile to God, there is Good News for you, me, and everyone! Jesus, in today's gospel, which is part of his farewell talk with his disciples, gives them and us a wonderful promise. He speaks of leaving them, by referring in veiled speech to his death on the cross. He then speaks of his coming again for them in veiled speech by referring to his resurrection. The promise he makes that I invite you to focus on today though is what he tells the disciples and us about the Holy Spirit. The promise is this: "I will not leave you orphaned." He will not abandon us or leave us all alone. The Holy Spirit, here translated from the Greek word *Parakletos* as the Advocate, Jesus promises is going to be with us forever. This Greek word can be translated Advocate and have the sense of one who functions for us like a representative of defence lawyer in a court of law. However, the word can also be translated as Helper, or One who is present along side of us.

I rather like this sense of the Spirit being present along side of us. If you're like me, you've probably had an experience like I did a few days ago. A few days ago, I happened to pay a visit to a couple of seniors. The one was feeling under the weather, and having stomach problems. As she told me about her condition, and hopes for a surgery to correct the ailment; there was a tremendous relief that came upon her when I asked if she would like me to pray for her. Immediately she agreed, and after the prayer one could see a lot more relaxed, and peaceful expression on her face. She thanked me for my prayer and for calling on her on that particular day.

The second senior I visited told me as soon as I walked in the door that she had been thinking about me earlier that day and was wondering if I was going to visit her. She then shared with me that

she had recently gone for an x-ray on her lungs and was now waiting for the results. After speaking with me about her anxieties, I communed her and prayed with her and she was most grateful to receive both the sacrament and the prayer I offered on her behalf. Such visits, I believe, were made due to the Holy Spirit's direction and activity on that day—the Spirit who walked along with both me and the two seniors in the face of difficult circumstances. Experiences like this affirm for me, and hopefully you, the reality of Jesus' promise: "I will not leave you orphaned," as well as "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever."

The following story also confirms the reality of God being with us and not leaving us orphaned: Bishop Berggrav served as leader in the Norwegian Church during World War II. He tells the story of a man who took his small son along on a trip to another village. One of the dangers of the journey involved walking across a rickety, narrow bridge. It was even more dangerous because the water beneath it ran swiftly.

Near the end of the day, the man and his son started to walk back to their own village. It was dark before they reached the bridge and the young boy became frightened. Sensing his son's fear, the father picked up his son and carried him the rest of the way in his arms. The boy soon fell asleep. When he awoke he saw the sunlight shining through the window of his bedroom and realized that he was home. Such is the gift of faith, for God to carry us safely through the dark times while we rest in comfort.¹

We are not orphans. The Holy Spirit walks along side of us as our Advocate, Helper, Counsellor, and Comforter. We all need the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives to counsel, direct and guide us. The following story reminds us of the guiding, counselling and direction of the Holy Spirit.

The role of a guidance counselor is an increasingly important role. Today's work world is highly specialized and there is an almost infinite variety of jobs to choose from. It can all be very confusing for the young high school or college student, who is trying to find a place.

The guidance counselor is one who assesses the abilities and interests of the student, then helps the student pick a course of study suited to those skills. The counselor informs the student of career possibilities for that particular set of skills, interests, and education. The guidance counselor is a living resource center, helping the high school student select the college that offers the best training in a particular field, and then helping to explain the application procedures. A good guidance counselor has the ability to steer a questioning student onto a rewarding career path. It is an extremely valuable position.

The Holy Spirit is the guidance counselor Jesus sends to be with us, the guidance counselor *par excellence*, who guides us in our walk with Christ.²

We are not orphaned. Christ is with us. His Holy Spirit is always alongside of us wherever we go and in whatever we do. Thanks to the Holy Spirit's presence and activity in us and through us; we can love God and our neighbour; making a difference in the world and in the church. Amen.

1 Cited from: *Emphasis: A Preaching Journal for the Parish Pastor* Vol. 23, No. 1, May-June 1993 (Lima, OH: CSS Publishing Co.), p. 27.

2 Cited from: *Emphasis: A Lectionary Preaching Journal*, May 29, 2011, <www.sermonsuite.com>.