

Homily John 14:15-21

“I will not leave you orphans.” This is the first promise in today’s Gospel. Jesus knows what enters the human mind when it feels distanced from Him. We all want and even need to hear these words because they speak directly to some of our greatest fears and challenges. They speak to our feelings of being isolated and abandoned. They speak to our loneliness and vulnerability. They remind us that we are not walking this earth without an identity or direction.

Our thoughts and questions today are no different than those of the Disciples at the Last Supper. The Disciples have been fed, feet have been washed, the betrayer has left. It is dark, there is tension in the air, and Jesus announces He is leaving. The person for whom they have left everything to follow now says He is leaving.

This “Farewell Discourse” as it is called, leaves many questions. The Disciples are puzzled. “We do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Show us the Father.”

Jesus knew that doubt would fill the hearts of the Disciples. Doubt that would lead them to have many orphan questions which is why He uses that word. Questions like, “What will we do. What will happen to us?” They feared being alone without the guidance of Jesus. Their fear pointed to a deeper reality...a reality that revealed that by themselves they doubted that they could stand alone as individuals. They doubted that they could stand together as the community of Disciples. That is when Jesus gives them the all-important promise: **“I will not leave you orphans.”**

Jesus spoke to the deeper reality that they were experiencing...the reality that by themselves they were not enough. Jesus reinforced that the Disciples, that we, were created to love and to be loved; to live in relationship as persons giving themselves to each other; to dwell, to abide, to remain with each other even as the Father is in Jesus and Jesus is in the Father.

The love that God shows for humanity is a love without bounds. Our God is the God of Creation who brought order out of chaos; our God is the God of Israel who brought slaves into the promised land; our God is the one who when we have gone astray from His principles has sent prophets to call us back to justice, and our God is the one who is

also Jesus our teacher, prophet, and savior who tells us that love is not reserved for the powerful but is also for the least of these.

In this passage from John, we find ourselves back in time before Christ's death and resurrection. Jesus is telling the disciples that tragedy awaits Him, that one of them will betray Him, and that there will soon be a time where He is not with them in the same way He is now. All this bad news is set, however, in the context of reassurance. Jesus tells the Disciples that they will not be abandoned by God as these events unfold. They are told that God will send a new Advocate that will help the Disciples and future generations discern the will of God as new issues and problems emerge. The Advocate, The Holy Spirit will be the voice of God, the voice of Jesus...and we will never be alone.

“I will not leave you orphans.” That's the promise. Regardless of the circumstances of our lives: storms, death, separation, confinement, we have never been and will never be orphaned by God. That must have sounded strange to the Disciples. In that same conversation Jesus says that He is leaving and coming. The tension of these two words confronts us with the question of whether Jesus, for us, is a past memory or a present reality; a sentimental story that makes us feel good or a living experience that challenges, guides, and nurtures our life.

According to Jesus the answer to that question lies deep within us. The answer to that question is determined by love that is revealed and fulfilled in keeping His commandments. The commandments to love our neighbor as ourselves, to love our enemies, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Whose feet do we wash? Whose feet do we ignore? Do we keep the commandments, or do we view them as the secular world does...a list of suggestions to be accepted or rejected as society or our lifestyle preferences dictate? If the latter is our path, it is one that ignores Christ's teachings. Is our love growing, expanding, transforming ourselves and the world? If it is, Jesus is a present reality for us, and we know the fulfillment of His promise that we are not orphans.

However, if we are not so loving, if we live in our own self-centered, self-focused world, we relegate ourselves and each other to a life of being alone and adrift in our own thoughts, concerns, and fears. Jesus will remain real, but we will have not claimed Him for ourselves. Keeping the commandments makes us present to the ongoing reality of Jesus in our lives. They don't earn us Jesus' love they reveal our love for Him...a love

that originates in His abiding love and presence within us. Every time we expand the boundaries of our love, we push back the darkness and loneliness of this world and create space within us where Jesus and the Father make their home.

St. John Paul II focuses on the subject of love in order to give us a clear understanding of the depth Jesus intends it to be. St. John Paul II emphasizes that our secular language misinterprets the word love. We cannot love a hamburger! We cannot love a car or any other inanimate object. The love that God shows for humanity is a love without bounds. We have witnessed His love in our Scripture readings since Easter. Jesus, the Good Shepherd wants to lead us back to God the Father through His word, His teachings, His guidance, and His direction.

We are living in difficult times, but St. Paul gives us hope in his letter to the Romans when he writes, "We know all good things work for good for those who love God." We're seeing the truth in his statement through the number of people who clamored to have the churches reopened, when the pandemic forced us to close them; clamored to spend prayer time in front of the Tabernacle; clamored to physically receive the Eucharist once again.

As difficult as the pandemic was, it created a call to a renewal of faith; a call to conversion; a call to return to the sacraments; a call to revisit, relearn, and relive the Ten Commandments. They are as relevant today as they were thousands of years ago when Moses descended Mount Sinai with God's gift written on two tablets. In telling us to observe the commandments, Jesus is not trying to take away our fun or our freedom. Instead, He is showing us how we were meant to live. We were meant to live in a loving relationship with both God and each other. Far from limiting our freedom and taking away our fun, these commandments bring us life.

Each of the Ten Commandments is a *revelation* because each one gives us an insight to the character of God. Each of the Ten commandments is a *confrontation* because each one gives us an insight into our own character. Each of the Ten Commandments is an *instruction* because each one identifies a path for us to walk. Finally, each of the Ten Commandments is a *promise*. God promises He will write His law on our hearts. He will move every commandment from the pages of the Bible down into the deepest instincts of our personalities.

Imagine how much better the world would be if everyone kept the Ten Commandments. There would be no murders, no thefts, no broken families, no wars. The Ten Commandments lead to a fulfilled life here on earth and more importantly they lead to everlasting life. If the first promise of our Gospel is that we will not be left orphans, the second promise is that by living the commandments of God, we will enter eternal life.