


## I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU ORPHANED

Acts 17. 22-31

1 Peter 3. 13-22

John 14. 15-21

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

‘I will not leave you orphaned.’ At some point, we all want or even need to hear these words, spoken by our Lord. They speak directly to some of our greatest fears and challenges: abandonment, isolation, loneliness and vulnerability. These words remind us that we are not destined to walk this earth without an identity or direction. You and I do not stand alone.

To be sure, there are seasons of life (and moments) when transitions, changes and sorrows can leave us feeling as orphans. Whether spoken or unspoken, the questions begin. ‘What will I do now?’ ‘Where will I go?’ ‘What happens next?’ ‘Who will love, nurture and guide me?’ ‘Who will stand on my side?’ These are the orphan’s questions. Questions like these were running through the heads and hearts of the disciples on the evening of the Last Supper.

As we saw in last week’s gospel passage, the disciples have been fed; their feet have been washed; and the betrayer has left. It is night; it is dark; and Jesus announces that he is going. The one for whom the disciples have left everything now says he is leaving. ‘We do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ ‘Show us the Father.’ More orphan questions.

Anyone who has ever loved and lost – a parent, a spouse, a child, a friend, security or hope – knows the orphan’s questions.

We fear becoming orphaned. That fear points to the deeper reality that by ourselves, we are not enough. It is not, however, because we are deficient. It is rather because we were never intended or created to be self-sufficient. We were never intended to stand alone as individuals. We were created to love and to be loved; to live in relationship as persons giving themselves to each other; to dwell, abide and remain within God even as the Father is in Christ and Christ is in the Father (the antithesis of being orphaned).

‘I will not leave you orphaned.’ That is our Lord’s promise. Regardless of the circumstances of our lives – storms, separation and even death – we have never been, and will never be orphaned by God. How so? Because Jesus promised that after he left this world, the Father would send the Holy Spirit. Christ did not, however, use those exact words. Rather, he spoke of a ‘Paraclete’ (*paracletos*), literally the ‘one called alongside another’. In various Bible translations, ‘Paraclete’ is rendered as Advocate, Counsellor, Mediator, Helper or Comforter. The ‘Paraclete’ is a friend; he is the friend that all of us could do with right now.

Perhaps you have not noticed, but when our Lord promised that his Father would send the ‘Paraclete’ he said, ‘And I will ask the Father, and he will give you *another* Advocate, to be with you for ever.’ Significantly, Jesus’s promised friend is *like him*: he is to be *another* ‘Paraclete’ (Counsellor, Mediator, Helper, Comforter). In his first letter St John, the author of today’s gospel, refers to Christ as a ‘Paraclete’.<sup>1</sup> This Spirit is to be another friend to us, just as our Lord has been.

In the next chapter of John’s gospel Jesus will say to his disciples, ‘You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father’

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. 1 Jn 2. 1: ‘But if anyone does sin, we have an *advocate* with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.’

(15. 14-15). Christ, the friend of the disciples, has revealed to them everything that he has heard from his Father; and in verses that immediately follow today's passage our Lord continues, 'But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you' (14. 26).

We see then that as friends of Jesus, we are to be given another friend, one who will instruct us and help us grow in our knowledge of God. We shall not be left alone. We shall not be condemned to be disciples without an instructor. The Spirit will ensure that we remember what Christ taught. The Spirit is therefore a most-needed friend, one who will allow the teaching and saving Lordship of Jesus to remain with his followers.

But there is another important point. As the Spirit reminds us of the teachings of Christ, he will *enable us to follow that teaching*<sup>2</sup> and to show our love for our Lord. We must not misinterpret Jesus's words: keeping his commandments does not 'earn us' his love. He loves us already, and he always will. He is present with us already, and he always will be. Keeping the commandments is simply a way for us to demonstrate our love for Christ, and to respond to his abiding love and presence in us.

And as we show our love for our Lord in this way, 'those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them' (14. 21). This is the most intimate role of the Spirit: he enables Jesus to show himself to us, in ways that we might not expect.

'I will not leave you orphaned.' Over and over, day after day, regardless of what is happening in our lives, that is Christ's promise. You and I have not been abandoned. Let us not make the mistake of consigning ourselves to the orphanages of this world.

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<sup>2</sup> To quote St Paul : 'The Spirit helps us in our weakness' (Rom 8. 26).

Rather, let us love God with all that we are and all that we have, even as the Father and the Son love us with all that they are and all that they have.

Amen.