

God Made Visible

Text: John 14:15–21

Other Lessons: Acts 17:16–31; Psalm 66:8–20; 1 Peter 3:13–22

Theme: Jesus calls us to obey his commandments—which means to love one another—so that God will be made visible through our lives.

The Sixth Sunday of Easter is a “mini-Pentecost” before Pentecost as we celebrate the theme “Christ, Sender of the Paraclete.” It is appropriate, of course, because of the detailed expositions on the person and work of the Holy Spirit in the farewell discourse of John’s Gospel, which is our *Gospel* today. While the disciples have been confronted with reasons to grieve, Christ’s victory over the grave has opened the way for the Holy Spirit to come to them!

The *Introit* notes that God’s Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path to life (Ps 119:105), coming as it does with the power of the Spirit. The Word is an expression of God’s faithfulness. Because of God’s faithfulness, we are to delight in his precepts. The *Prayer of the Day* asks for God’s inspiration and guidance to think right things and to do them. The Spirit gives such guidance.

Listen to v 16 from *Psalm 66*: “Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul.” Who could ever imagine that the gift of God is the sending of another advocate to be with us—in fact, to be *in* us—forever? The *First Reading*, Acts 17:16–31, “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man.” Instead, Christ has promised an amazing spiritual union between himself and his disciples: God does not live in temples made by man, but by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit he does live in man himself! The *Epistle*, 1 Pet 3:13–21, teaches that we share in Christ’s resurrection victory by virtue of our “Baptism, which . . . now saves [us]” (3:21). It is, of course, in this Sacrament that the Holy Spirit was also given to us.

This discourse takes place at the Last Supper (see chapter 13), and represents Jesus’ attempt to prepare the disciples for what is coming. He begins by emphasizing belief (14:1–14) and then shifts to an emphasis on love (14:15–24).

In verses 15–24, Jesus introduces two great ideas:

- First, “If you love, me, keep my commandments.... One who has my commandments, and keeps them, that person is one who loves me” (vv. 15, 21, 23–24). Jesus links love and obedience. It is tempting to talk about God’s love without mentioning our duty to obey.
- Second, “I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, that he may be with you forever.... I will not leave you orphans” (vv. 16, 18). This is Jesus’ promise to give us the Holy Spirit, who will become God’s presence with us on a daily basis in this world.

It seems more appropriate to end with verse 24. “If a man loves me, he will keep my word” (v. 23) and “He who doesn’t love me doesn’t keep my words” (v. 24) mirror “If you love me, keep my commandments”

15 “If you love me, keep my commandments. *16* I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, (Greek: *parakletos*) that he may be with you forever— *17* the Spirit of truth, whom the world can’t receive; for it doesn’t see him, neither knows him. You know him, for he lives with you, and will be in you.”

"If you love me, keep my commandments" (v. 15). This passage begins and ends (vv. 15, 21) by tying love to obedience. Our obedience is a sign of our love. In this Gospel, faithfulness to Jesus' words is a defining mark of discipleship (8:31; 37, 51; 12:47-48).

"keep my commandments" (v. 15). "Commandments" is plural. In this Gospel Jesus has given the disciples three commandments:

- **"If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you"** (13:14-15).
- **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love (*agape*) one another, just like I have loved you; that you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"** (13:34-35). The *agape* love that Jesus commands is not sentimental feeling, which cannot be commanded, but loving action, which can be.
- **"Don't let your heart be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me"** (14:1).

The commandments to love (13:34-35) and to believe (14:1) are open-ended, in contrast to most Torah laws, which are very specific. It is easy to judge whether we have been faithful to the Torah law prohibiting adultery, but how can we know whether we have fulfilled the demands of love or the demands of faith? Jesus' "commandments are not simply moral precepts; they involve a whole way of life in loving union with him". They "include the full range of the revelation from the Father, not simply ethical instructions; ...the lover of Jesus will live in the light of their guidance and their power"

"I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, (*parakletos*) that he may be with you forever" (v. 16). This is the Spirit that descended on Jesus at his baptism (1:32), although the word at his baptism was *pneuma* and the word here is *parakletos*.

This is the first time that Jesus uses the word *parakletos*, and the shift from *pneuma* (Spirit) to *parakletos* is significant. In the opening chapters of this Gospel:

- The *pneuma* descended from heaven like a dove and remained on Jesus at his baptism (1:32).
- Jesus baptizes with the (the Holy Spirit) (1:33).
- Jesus tells Nicodemus that **"unless one is born of water and *Spirit*, he can't enter into the Kingdom of God"** (3:5).
- Jesus says, **"So is everyone who is born of the *Spirit*"** (3:8)
- Jesus "gives the *Spirit* without measure" (3:34).
- **"God is Spirit"** (4:24)—and **"It is the *Spirit* who gives life"** (6:63).

But the tone changes when Jesus begins to speak about the *paraclete* in chapter 14. The emphasis shifts to the help that the *paraclete* will render to the disciples.

- The *paraclete* will be with the disciples forever (14:16).
- The *paraclete* **"will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you"** (14:26).
- The *paraclete* **"will testify about me"** (15:26).
- It is to the disciples' advantage that Jesus goes away, **"for if I don't go away, the *paraclete* won't come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you"** (16:7).

Paraclete can mean a lawyer who pleads your case or a witness who testifies in your behalf. The literal meaning is "someone called in; but it is the reason *why* the person is called in which gives the word its distinctive associations.... Always a *Paraclete* is someone called in to help when the person who calls him in is in trouble or distress or doubt or bewilderment"

Paraclete has been translated Advocate, Counselor, Comforter, and Intercessor, but each of those expresses only one facet of *Paraclete*. The original readers of this Gospel would have heard the full richness of its various meanings.

"The Paraclete's role is best understood... by noting the verbs... used by John to describe what the Paraclete will do:

(1) In relation to Jesus' disciples, the Paraclete will *be with* them forever (14:16f.) to *teach* and *remind* them of what Jesus has already taught (v. 26). He... will *testify* to them, and through them to the world, about Jesus (15:26f.). He will *guide* them into all the truth and will *glorify* Jesus by *speaking* what He hears from the Father. He will even *predict* things to come (16:13-15).

(2) In relation to the world, the Paraclete will act as God's advocate, to *convict* the world of sin and *prove it wrong* in its standards of justice and judgment (16:8-11)"

Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as "another *paraclete*" the implication being that Jesus is also a *paraclete*. However, as a *paraclete*, Jesus is limited by the Incarnation—by time and space. He can be in only one place at a time, and can help only a limited number of people in any given time. Moreover, he is moving toward his glorification—his death, resurrection, and ascension—so he will be leaving the disciples. The new *paraclete* will be with all disciples everywhere and will be with them forever.

Even though the Spirit-*paraclete* is coming to help us on earth, Jesus continues to serve as our *paraclete* in heaven. "But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). "Here the ascended Lord is viewed as a Paraclete *in* the court of heaven, pleading the cause of his own; the Holy Spirit is then understood as the Paraclete *from* heaven, supporting and representing the disciples in the face of a hostile world". This must have been a welcome word to John's church, which was suffering persecution and had to feel some sense of abandonment by Jesus.

This *paraclete* "is the Spirit of truth, whom the world (*kosmos*) can't receive; for it doesn't see him, neither knows him" (v. 17a). "It is interesting to see the Spirit associated with truth, for we have just had Jesus describe himself as 'the truth' (v. 6), and we earlier learned that those who worship the Father must do so 'in truth' (4:23-24). Clearly truth is very closely associated with the Godhead"

Illustration

The moon was low on the horizon, and snow covered the ground. Then a strong wind came up and started blowing the loose snow.

The snow "made the wind visible in a curiously beautiful way, like a fast-moving river of light, with the snow dust catching and holding the glints from the moonlight."

That's a beautiful image, isn't it—wind made visible by snow dust. We can't see the wind, but we can see its effects.

But the snow dust, glinting in the moonlight and caught up in the wind, is different. When we see the snow dust caught up in the wind—moving with the wind—we are suddenly privileged to see something of the wind itself—to see the shape of the wind—to see its swirls—its ups and downs. The snow dust, at least for a moment, makes the invisible visible—gives us a glimpse of something elemental that we are not usually privileged to see. I see that God is made visible in the lives of people. "God shines on them and shows us in their lives the way the wind is blowing."

And so Jesus said,

"A new commandment I give to you,
that you love one another,
just as I have loved you;
that you also love one another.

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another."

If we can bring ourselves to love each other—to help each other—to take care of each other—our lives will be like snowflakes illuminated by the light of God—moving toward the kingdom—helping people to see God living in us—drawing them to us and to God. Having been saved, he moves us to love God's commands and to love God. His work is eternal and has eternal consequences for us. It is his love for you that makes you a keeper! Amen.