

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 17, 2020, Cycle A

In a time when the world has been dramatically transformed, many people undoubtedly feel disconnected and abandoned by God. Our Gospel passage from John especially speaks to that feeling of abandonment. Jesus talks about leaving and going to the Father, and these early disciples felt afraid, confused, and alone. They feel Jesus is deserting them, and that sense of abandonment will not leave them until they experience Jesus as risen.

In a time of social distancing, the reception of the sacraments has been limited and even delayed. Physical, sacramental rituals are an important way to express faith and connection with God and with one another. Because we are flesh and blood beings who are social beings is why Jesus gave us the sacraments! We not only need to hear the word, we need to be able to tangibly touch and feel the Word and to touch and feel the word through each other. And can people receive the Spirit without baptism and confirmation? How can we have God within us without regularly receiving the Eucharist? Jesus knew exactly what he was doing when he gave us a meal to remember him by, and participate in his risen presence. No wonder we feel bereft and abandoned. Sacraments do connect us to God's grace in concrete and visible ways. Jesus though, takes pains to assure his early disciples that he is not abandoning them, and that he has not abandoned us.

Jesus says: "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you!" How will Jesus be with us? Jesus explains how: "...I will ask the Father, and he will give another Advocate to be with you always, The Spirit of truth... he remains with you, and will be in you."

The Greek word for "advocate" is "parakletos," Paraclete. "Parakletos" is a very rich Greek word having many nuances. "Parakletos" can be "advocate," like a defense attorney who takes our side. "Parakletos" also means "helper," "mediator," "intercessor," and even "comforter." And Jesus does not limit the Spirit to Baptism, the laying of hands, or any sacrament. The Spirit is not constrained in the same way we are.

The Spirit of Truth, this "Parakletos" is the same Spirit who empowered Jesus as Messiah. As Risen Lord, Jesus now breathes this Spirit into us – the Spirit that indwells in the Father and the Son making the Father and Son one. The Spirit now indwells in us as the Church making us one with the Father and Son.

As "comforter," the Spirit does not wrap us in a warm fuzzy cocoon. No, as "comforter" the Spirit comforts us with the assurance that we possess new life now because we live in the Risen Jesus through baptism. Thus comforted, we are impelled by the Spirit, as the Spirit impelled the early Apostles, out of our churchly confines to proclaim and live the life of Jesus. Phillip impelled by the Spirit went boldly to Samaria to proclaim Christ, we are told in "Acts of the Apostles." Impelled by the Spirit, Peter and John go down to Samaria and prayed with the new converts, and they received the same Holy Spirit. Today, impelled by this same Spirit, we modern disciples, continue to reach out – touching those who are in need. Over the past months, there have been countless stories of love: health care workers caring for the sick, delivery people ensuring the arrival of goods, agricultural workers producing food, people and organizations creating and donating masks and protective gear, anyone in an essential service, anyone who stayed home to save lives. All of these are examples of love. So, in the absence of physical connections and sacramental actions, trust that the Holy Spirit sustains all of us who love another.

Jesus has not left us orphaned. The Spirit of the Father and Son has been poured into us, an advocate and comforter who impels us to continue the healing mission of the Risen One.