

## SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (A)

John 14:15-21  
May 29, 2011

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In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.  
Alleluia! Christ is risen!

***He is risen indeed! Alleluia!***

In the musical, ***Fiddler on the Roof***, Tevye asks his wife Golde, “*Do you love me?*”

Golde responds, “*Do I what?*”

Tevye again asks, “*Do you love me?*”

And Golde considers out loud: “*Do I love him? For twenty-five years I’ve lived with him, fought with him, starved with him. Twenty-five years my bed is his. If that’s not love, what is?!*”

Tevye then excitedly responds: “*Then do you love me?*”

Golde answers, “*I suppose I do.*”

Tevye replies, “*And I suppose I love you, too.*”

And then they join together, “*It doesn’t change a thing, but even so. After twenty-five years, It’s nice to know.*”

For Tevye and Golde, loving each other means ***working*** together, ***spending time*** together. It means ***raising children*** together and ***supporting*** each other, and ***providing*** for each other. In short, loving each other has a great deal to do with ***actions*** and a ***way of life***, and not so much with feelings or emotions.

Even so, as he was preparing his disciples for his departure, Jesus announced to them: “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*” He didn’t say, “*If you love me, you will say nice things about me,*” or “*If you love me, you will have this warm, fuzzy feeling of affection towards me.*” No. He said, “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*”

The great 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century patriarch and preacher, St. John Chrysostom wrote of today’s Gospel:

*At all times it is works and actions that we need,  
not a mere show of words.*

*It is easy for anyone to say or promise something,  
but it is not so easy to act on that word or promise...*

“*If you love me,*” Christ said, “***keep my commandments.***” ...

*I have commanded you to love one another*

*and to do to one another as I have done to you.*

*To love me is to obey these commands*

*and to submit to me, your beloved.*

Christians — those who are baptized — are called, not simply to believe in Jesus, but *to follow him*. We are called, not simply to trust in Jesus, but *to love him*. And Christ himself says that this love for him will be manifest in *obedience* to him. Our love for Jesus, will be shown to the world in our obedience, in our loving submission to Christ's will.

Episcopal Priest, Linda Lee Clader fleshes out what this obedience to Jesus will look like. She writes:

*The love Jesus commands is not a feeling —  
not even a feeling of certainty about union with Christ.  
The love Jesus commands  
is about a master washing the feet of his disciples,  
and a king dying the death of a criminal.*

Indeed, in the previous chapter of St. John's Gospel, Jesus declared to his disciples: "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you*" (John 13:34).

So, loving Jesus means keeping his commandments. And paramount among those commandments from our Lord is to love one another *as he has loved us*. Which is to say, we are to *humbly serve* one another, as he has served us. We are to *give of ourselves*, as he gave himself for us. We are to *pour out our lives* for the neighbor, as he poured out his life for us.

And how is this possible? How can it be that we might obey Christ's command, and love one another as he has loved us? Well, in today's Gospel Jesus declares:

*I will pray the Father,  
and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even  
the Spirit of truth...  
I will not leave you desolate;  
I will come to you.*

The Greek word here translated as "Counselor" is παρακλητος (parakletos). And it literally means "one who has been called to our side," and it can mean a number of things, such as "one who exhorts," "one who comforts," "one who helps," or "one who makes appeals on one's behalf." Likewise in various translations the word is rendered not only as "Counselor" but as "Advocate," "Comforter," "Intercessor," "Mediator" and "Helper." That's what Jesus promises to us — he promises one called to our side, an advocate, a comforter, an intercessor, a mediator, a helper.

If you are a fan of blues music, you may have heard of the artist, Jimmy Reed. Born into poverty in 1925, the son of a Mississippi share-cropper, Reed

lived a difficult life, suffering from alcoholism and epilepsy, and he died at the age of 50. But his music helped bring the throbbing harmonica-and-guitar-driven, rhythm-and-blues of the Mississippi Delta into the popular rock-and-roll mainstream, and influenced the sound of such bands as *The Rolling Stones*.

Last week I came across an interesting story behind Jimmy Reed's recordings. Apparently, if you listen very carefully to some of his old recordings, you can hear — ever so faintly in the background — a soft woman's voice murmuring in advance, the words of the next verse of the song. The story goes that Jimmy Reed would get so absorbed in the bluesy beat and the throbbing guitar riffs of his music, that he simply couldn't remember the words of his own songs. He needed help with the lyrics, and the woman's voice was none other than that of his wife, Mary — devotedly coaching her husband through the recording session, by whispering the upcoming stanzas into his ear as he sang.

That strikes me as a marvelous image of what Jesus is promising to us Christians in today's Gospel: "*I will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth...he dwells with you, and will be in you.*" This Counselor — the Holy Spirit — will, in effect, whisper the lyrics of the Gospel song in the ears of the faithful.

When Jesus walked bodily on earth, *he* was the one who instilled in his disciples the right words — he coached them through the proper verses — he taught them his commandments. But in the Gospel, as Jesus is drawing near to his time of departure — when the disciples assume they will be on their own — now Jesus assures them that this task is will be handed over to *another Counselor*, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth.

A primary task, then, of the Holy Spirit is to remind the faithful of the truth, to jog the memories of the followers of Jesus about all of his commandments, so that they can keep them in love. The Spirit whispers the lyrics of the hymn of faithful obedience in our ears.

It may surprise us to think of the Holy Spirit in this way, as a quiet, whispering teacher of the commandments of Jesus. Often the Spirit is advertised in flashier terms — the Spirit *gives ecstasy* — the Spirit evokes *speaking in tongues* — the Spirit prompts *dramatic and miraculous healings*. And indeed, the Holy Spirit does accomplish such things. But they are *not* his primary work. The *primary* work of the Spirit, is like that of Jimmy Reed's wife whispering in his ear. The Spirit's chief work is to remind us — the children of God — of everything Jesus taught and commanded (Jn 14:26), speaking the gospel lyrics into the ears of the forgetful faithful.

So the Spirit does it in Sunday School classrooms. The Spirit does it when parents pray with their children, and when grandparents read Bible stories. The Spirit does it in when we pause for daily devotion and prayer. He does it in the Hymns we sing and in the liturgy we celebrate. The Spirit does it in Vacation Bible School and in Confirmation classes. He does it in the scriptures publicly

proclaimed in worship, and in the announcement of sins forgiven. He does it in washing with the water of Holy Baptism. He does it in the giving of Christ's Body and Blood in the supper of Holy Communion.

And all that whispering of the Holy Spirit empowers us to love Christ, and keep his commandments.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

***He is risen indeed! Alleluia!***

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