

Easter 4

I take as my text from St. John's Gospel:

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.

Here we are, still in the Easter Season, the Fourth Sunday, and the Gospel points us toward Trinity Sunday which, traditionally, we look to for expositions on the Trinity itself, a Church Doctrine that has eluded our understanding since the earliest days of Christianity. Therefore, we must wait until Trinity Sunday to delve into the mystery of the Holy Trinity. It's not that far away and there is much to celebrate in between. As a preview, we could offer that perhaps our best definition of the Trinity may be found in the Athanasian Creed. It's rather extensive, yet remains as one of the three great Creeds of Christendom, the other two being the Apostles Creed and Nicene Creed.

In times past, it was oft recited in the Anglican Church, but unfortunately today the Athanasian Creed is not well known among most Anglicans. While both complex and beautiful, it more fully expounds our Catholic Faith.

However, since Trinity Sunday is still four Sundays away — that festival in the Church Year peculiar to Anglicans — today, as we look at the Gospel passage from St. John, this Gospel from a certain perspective, by that I mean of separateness, while, as a whole, we find that the passage vividly reveals to us the interrelationship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In this passage, Jesus reveals to us that separateness, while at the same time revealing the interdependence of each Person of the Trinity, and their equality.

Separateness, interdependence, and equality: for the Son receives from the Father all the things that he has, his whole Nature, his Attributes, and communicates them to the Holy Spirit; whereas the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son by progressively revealing to the Apostles the full sense of what Jesus has taught them.

As he was approaching the final confrontation with the Jewish leadership, Jesus wanted the Apostles to understand the necessity of his leaving them. Truly Jesus Christ must die on the Cross for the Salvation of Mankind, but why must he physically leave the world? Why could he not remain with the Apostles after his Resurrection?

The answer is both simple and complex. Simple in that, while in the physical body, Christ was also subject to the limitations of the physical world; he could be only in one place at one time.

Yet, he must be able to be everywhere all the time. This he could do only through the transformation of his earthly Body, by taking on a spiritual body, and departing from the physical world, returning to Heaven as the Conquering King.

Only then could he send the Holy Spirit into the world, and through the Spirit he, Jesus Christ, could be everywhere at once. He could be in the hearts and minds of all the faithful; he could work in and through the revelation of God to all the world; he could work through the sacraments of the Church; and he could inspire and guide the Church into all truth.

In more complex terms, Christ's departure from the world was part of the great plan of the redemption of mankind. Each of the three Persons of the Trinity were to perform a part in this plan. Thus, it was the part of Jesus Christ to make an atonement, and it was the part of the Holy Spirit to apply it. The Holy Spirit could not descend into the world until Jesus had completed his part, that of dying on the Cross for the sins of the world, conquering death by rising from the grave on the third day, and finally ascending into Heaven.

Once our Saviour had left the earth, the Holy Spirit could carry forth the plan, and apply it to all mankind.

In this plan of redemption, the role of the Holy Spirit, in a word, would be three-fold: to comfort the disciples; to teach them, or remind them, of the truth; and to aid them in their work.

The Greek word John used for Comforter is *Paracletos* and, while Comforter may be to some degree suitable to the context, the true meaning of the word is Advocate, or Helper.

Indeed, the role of the Holy Spirit is that of Advocate, or Christ's Representative on earth.

As Christ's Representative, he carries on the work of Jesus, and he inspires and strengthens our Lord's disciples in fulfilling their vocation.

In describing the work of the Holy Spirit, John uses a Greek word, *elegchein*, that, while translated as "reprove," more appropriately means "convince." It is a word that is used in cross-examination, whether of a person on trial, or an opponent in an argument, and the idea is that by cross-examination, the person will come to see and admit their own errors.

Thus, a person is both convinced of the error of his ways, or the weakness of his case or argument, and convicted of committing the error, or crime, or sin.

When we hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit works in our very souls, awakening our consciences, pricking our hearts, so that we may repent and believe; but, for those whose hearts are hardened by their unbelief, who refuse to repent and believe, they will be convicted of willful blindness in the sight of God.

The Holy Spirit also convinces us of judgment, for, on the Cross, evil was condemned, judged, and defeated.

The work of the Holy Spirit convinces us of the Love of God, and of the certainty of salvation through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, bringing God's truth to all mankind. His revelation of the Truth is a progressive process, giving to us what we are fit to learn, and building upon each stage as we are able to grasp and understand.

Most effectively, the Holy Spirit works in and through the Church, which is his sphere of operation and the guardian of the Faith. Here we see that the promise of divine guidance was not given exclusively to the Apostles, but to the Church as well, for he is guiding the Church into all Truth, throughout all ages.

All Truth: that is, all the truth that is necessary for salvation.

The Church then is the *repository* of that Truth, the progressive revelation of God to mankind.

The passage today from St. John's Gospel takes us to a time just before our Lord's betrayal, where he repeats a promise made earlier, that he would send a **Comforter**. But, before the Comforter could come, our Lord, must go away, he must leave them.

Now the time had come for Jesus to fulfill that promise. In an act of love that surpasses all our understanding, Jesus, as God and Man, would give up his life for us, and suffer death upon the Cross. His life was not taken from him; rather, he freely, lovingly gave up his life for us as a ransom.

But, our Lord did not just suffer death, he conquered death, he conquered Satan and sin by his Resurrection.

And with his Ascension, he laid aside the constraints of that earthly body, so that he could be present in all the world, in the heart and soul of each of us through the Holy Spirit.

However complex the Doctrine of the Trinity may seem, it conveys to us the interdependence of the Godhead — God as Father, God as Son, and God as Holy Spirit — though separate, they are One and co-equal. And they are bound one to another through eternal, divine love.

This eternal, divine, Fatherly love is extended to us through Jesus Christ and kept alive in us through the operation of the Holy Spirit.