

Whitsunday (Pentecost)

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

If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of Truth....

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.”

The Gospel passage that we read today is one of the most phenomenal passages in Scripture. In it, Jesus clearly shows us the Trinity, and the relationship of each to the other. We see in this passage from John the inseparableness of love and obedience, and the promise of peace and understanding and strength.

We are given insight into love as more than a feeling, or emotion, or a passion; indeed, a revelation of love as the fulfilling of commitment, of responsibility, of obedience.

For us human beings, endowed with reason, having rational souls, we cannot escape those most human descriptions of love; yet, we can embrace the divineness of love when we come to understand it more fully in the sense of the relationship within the Holy Trinity, especially of God to his Son, they to us, and we to them; and even more, in the aspect of obedience, for, in obedience, we find the maturation of that loving relationship as creatures of God.

Is this an indictment of love as a feeling, or emotion, or passion? Not at all, for in Jesus, becoming one of us through the Incarnation, we saw the full expression of love, both in its humanness, as well as its divineness; we saw that bond of love which has been extended to us. Indeed, the bond of love that incorporates God and all of his creation: God to us, us to God, and we to each to the other.

This bond of love being predicated on obedience to God, Jesus promised His Apostles, and us, a Helper, who, Scripture tells us, is the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, Who will enable us in our human struggles.

So, today, with the Feast of Pentecost, we celebrate the coming into the world of that Helper, the Holy Spirit, whose coming breathed life into the Church. We celebrate the birthday of the Church. We celebrate the fulfillment of the promises Jesus made to His Apostles before He offered Himself up on the Cross.

When we pause to consider the words of St. Luke in the Epistle lesson, we can see what a momentous day this would be in the Apostles' lives as they bore witness to the birth of the Church, God breathing life into the Body of Christ, as His Church would be known, and setting into motion a movement that would change mankind and the world forever.

In the words of St. Luke from the Acts of the Apostles:

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were filled with the Holy Ghost...

Here was fulfilled the promise that Jesus had made: "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever ..."

But Who was this "Comforter"?

Though the translation into English is "Comforter," from the Greek "*parakletos*," it really means "someone who is called in." However, in the context of John's usage, a truer meaning is perhaps "advocate," or, even better, "One who would *supply Christ's own place* in His absence."

That is to say, the Holy Spirit is Christ's Representative on earth, carrying on our Lord's work.

But, truly, the Holy Spirit is more than that, for if Jesus had remained in the world, He would have been limited by His physical presence, whereas the Holy Spirit is not limited.

The Holy Spirit entered the world to perfect the work of Christ, to execute it by applying it to the hearts of men.

He would teach the Apostles all things needed for them to understand the Apostolic Office, in particular those things they were not prepared to hear, or could not understand, all those things our Lord imparted to them when He was present with them.

The Holy Spirit would fulfill the promise that they would be inspired, and under His infallible guidance, they would organize the Church, and record the truths necessary for its edification.

Jesus told them that the Holy Spirit would "bring all things to your remembrance." That is to say, that the Holy Spirit would preside over their memories, so that they would recall all such truths and doctrine as was necessary, and be reminded of the sayings of our Lord which might otherwise be forgotten. Not only bring to their remembrance, but also teach them the meaning of those things of which Jesus had spoken.

The work of the Holy Spirit wasn't confined to the Apostles and the Apostolic Age: His work is throughout all time, within the Church, and within each of us.

And the work of the Holy Spirit is the continuing love of Jesus Christ, strengthening each of us that we may respond to the Love of God in Jesus Christ by keeping His Commandments.

Indeed, our love of Christ, of God, is shown through obedience to His Commandments, as our Saviour showed forth His love of the Father by obedience, even unto death on the Cross.

This obedience to our Lord is not external for others to see, but is written on the heart for God to see. It is the result of a true love of Christ, that brings us into a union with the Father and the Son, in the bond of love.

Through our love of Christ, He will manifest or show Himself to us, and He and the Father will make Their abode with us, that is, take up residence in our hearts, whereas we are temples, and, as a result of our love and obedience, fit temples for Their abode.

In the words of St. Paul in his 1st Letter to the Corinthians, “Ye are the temple of the living God,” and, again, in the same Letter, “Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost.”

The passage for today ends with these words from our Lord:

But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.

It is not just that the Son loves the Father, but that He loves all that is the Father's, all that the Father commands, being One with the Father, with the greatest expression of that love being obedience to the Father, even unto Death on the Cross.

One of the endearing traits of St. John was his total embrace of the fullness of God's Love. This love, though easily misinterpreted as sentimentality, was, in reality, based on obedience to God. John epitomized the Christian Love that was expressed in the Law given by Christ: the commandment to love God, and to love your neighbor.

Our Lord's concern, as He approached the time when He would leave them, was not that the Apostles show their love for Him in grief, in tears, but in obedience to His Commandments.

And so it follows that, just as the Apostles showed their love for our Lord through obedience; and just as our Lord showed His love of God by obedience, so we must show our love of Christ by obedience to Him.

In the world around us, love is mostly expressed as a sentiment, or emotion, with little thought of the commitment that is integral to it. There are outward expressions of love in words and actions by those who, at the same time, bring pain, grief, and heartache, and exercise inconsiderateness, irritability, thoughtlessness, and unkindness.

As Christians, we are called to a higher plane. We are called to embrace love, first, in divine terms, as that which can only be shown in true obedience to our Lord, as He said: “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”

Secondly, as Christians, we are to embrace love in our humanness through commitment and being responsible in our relationships with each other and with our Creator.

And, thirdly, subject to our human nature, we are called upon to embrace the emotional outpouring from the heart, that by reason we cannot resist, in a manner that reflects Christ-like Love: love that is selfless and giving.

There is something else beyond love as obedience: it is the very Nature of God. God is love and love is the bond of the Trinity. It binds the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit together, and ultimately includes us: the Bond of Love.

It is a love divine: selfless and enduring, encompassing and eternal, to which we are called, and in its context we are able to understand the concept of the ultimate test of our love of God as being obedience to his commandments, expressed in the Summary of the Law: to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind; and to love our neighbor as ourself.

In essence, it is to Divine Love that we must be obedient.

Obedience to that Divine Love, as Christians, begins with the profession of our love for Christ shown forth in all that we do.

While this may seem to be a daunting task, God, in his love for us, has provided a means, a way, someone to help us face that daunting task. God has sent the Holy Spirit to be a guide, a counselor, and an advocate for us; to inspire us and lead us into all Truth.

God sent the Holy Spirit to the Church to consecrate it; He has given us the Holy Spirit as a principle of inward spiritual life, dwelling within us individually to meet our spiritual needs, and to stimulate spiritual motives.

From John's Gospel, we come to understand that the Holy Spirit is something more than the word "Comforter," would imply.

As members of the Body of Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells within each of us; His Power is concentrated in the Body of Christ, the Church, where He is ever present; and through our membership in that Body, we receive the benefit of His Power through the Sacraments, and through corporate worship.

That first Christian Pentecost marked the beginning of the New Covenant, the old law being superseded by the new Law of Love. When Jesus ascended into heaven, He left behind His established Church, having instructed the Apostles that they were to wait for Him to send to them the Holy Spirit, which would open their minds to all the knowledge they had acquired.

Then, as promised, the Holy Spirit descended upon them, filling them, and breathing life into the Body of Christ, the Church.

We are the proof, and living examples of the effect of the “Comforter” on each of the Apostles, and the fruit of their work, the Gospel harvest.

We are proof that the Holy Spirit abides always in the Church.

As the Lord promised, so He has fulfilled that promise: "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth."

The Holy Spirit dwells within each of us, giving clearness to our faith by illuminating our minds, giving zeal to our charity by shedding abroad in our hearts the love of God, and giving strength and power to all our graces.

The Holy Spirit enables us in our efforts to be obedient to, and to embrace the Law of Love.

The Holy Spirit is present when we are baptized, and we receive Him at the time of confirmation during the laying-on of hands.

The Holy Spirit is ever present within the Church, His sphere of operation, and it is there, within this Body of Christ, where we should seek Him; indeed, while He is ever present in all creation, it is in the Church that we will finally find Him.