

JESUS' FAREWELL GIFT: 6TH SUNDAY EASTER C

I wonder in how many different places and in how many different houses you've lived over the years of your life. I've just about lost count. It's not easy leaving a place, especially when we've formed close ties. Unless it's leaving a destructive relationship or some other difficult situation, most of us, I think, hate goodbyes. Just the prospect fills us with sadness and dread, even if we're leaving to get married or take up a better job, or to go to some dream home. There's still the pain of packing up and leaving for an unknown future. There's still the pain of saying goodbye to family members and friends. Saying such things as *'I'll visit when I can', 'I'll ring you', 'I'll text you', 'I'll e-mail you', 'I'll catch up the first chance we get'*, might ease the pain of separation to a certain extent, but it doesn't take it away completely.

The gospel today takes us to the Last Supper, to Jesus' last meal, his farewell meal with close friends. He tells them that he is going away and they will no longer have him with them in the old familiar ways. But he softens the sting, the pain which they are feeling, with three very comforting and connected promises. He says that he is going away to prepare a place for them (Jn 14:3). So they can look forward to a great reunion with him one day. He goes on to promise: *'I shall not leave you orphans, I shall come to you'* (14:18)

In his third promise, Jesus spells out how he will come to them and how he will still be with them when they can no longer see him, touch him, hear his voice, and walk with him. He will come to them in his gift of his Spirit. He will give them the very same Spirit that animated him, as he went about Palestine doing good, preaching and teaching, healing and helping in every way. He will give them his Spirit to continue his presence to them. The Spirit, then, will be a kind of second self, Jesus' alter ego. The Spirit, just like Jesus himself has been for them all along, will be their great Comforter and Defender in all their conflicts and trials.

When the Spirit comes to them, Jesus assures them, the Spirit will remind them of everything that Jesus has said, and everything that Jesus has meant to them. So they will still sense his living and loving presence among them. So, the Spirit will be the permanent bond among them all.

When the Spirit comes to them, they will also receive Jesus' special gift of peace. So he says to them: *'Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace which the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid'* (14:27).

We all know the kind of peace we need in our hearts and lives right now. It's a peace that only the Spirit of Jesus can give. We need wise leaders to bring the terrible war in

Syria to a complete stop. We need his Spirit to bring divided Christians together into one united world-wide community. We need his Spirit to assure people who are feeling alienated and isolated in their churches that they are important to the community, and that they are still loved, no matter what. We need peace in our workplaces, to bring an end to gossiping, bitterness and backbiting. We need peace in our homes to replace tension and misunderstandings, as well as any verbal, emotional, or physical abuse. We need peace among the players of our sporting teams, so that those who strive to be best on the ground will also be the fairest.

It's true that we don't have the physical presence of Jesus with us the way his first disciples did when he talked with them around his table, washed their feet, and gave them his reassuring promises. His farewell to them was a real farewell. He would no longer be with them as he had been. But he assured them and us after them, that he is present in a different way, in his gift of the Holy Spirit. If only we keep on trusting in the presence of the Spirit to us, we will have peace in the midst of any personal, family, or community turmoil that comes our way!

But this peace is not something we can manufacture ourselves or spray on by our own power. It's a gift that comes from Jesus, who doesn't want to lose touch with us. Can we be more open to receiving that gift from him, that gift that will keep strong our ties with him?

Surely that's something to pray for during this Eucharist, and in the rest of the days of Easter leading to Pentecost!

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