

# Compassion of Christ Catholic Community

## Homily, Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 17, 2020

**Reading 1:** Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

Philip [the deacon, whose four daughters had the gift of prophecy,] went down to the town of Samaria and there proclaimed the Messiah to them. Without exception, the crowds paid close attention to Philip, listening to his message and taking note of the miracles he performed. Many people were freed from unclean spirits, which came out shrieking loudly. Many people who could not move or could not walk were cured. The rejoicing in the town rose to a fever pitch.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. The two went down to these people and prayed that they might receive the Holy Spirit. The Spirit had not yet come down upon any of them, since they had only been baptized in the name of Jesus. Upon arriving, the pair laid hands on the Samaritans and they received the Holy Spirit.

**Psalm:** Psalm 66:1-7, 16, 20

Shout to God, all the earth!

Sing the glory of God's Name—give glorious praise!

Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!

Your enemies cower before your great strength!

The whole earth worships you and sings praises to you—  
all creation praises your Name!"

Come and see the works of God—

God's deeds on our behalf are wonderous.

God turned the sea into dry land;

and people passed through the river on foot.

There we rejoiced in God, whose reign of power lasts forever.

Come and hear, all who revere God,

and I will tell what the Holy One has done for me.

Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer  
or stopped loving me!

**Reading 2:** 1 Peter 3:15-18

In your hearts, set Jesus apart as holy and sovereign. Should anyone ask you the reason for this hope of yours, be ever ready to reply, but speak gently and respectfully. Keep your conscience clear so that, whenever you are defamed, those who slander your way of life in Christ may be shamed. If it should be God's will that you suffer, it is better to do so for good deeds than for evil ones.

The reason why Christ died for everyone's sins—for the sake of the just and the unjust—was in order to lead you to God. Jesus was put to death but was given life in the Spirit.

**Gospel:** John 14:15-21

Jesus said to the disciples,

“If you love me and obey the command I give you,  
I will ask the One who sent me to give you another Paraclete,  
to be with you always.

This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept,  
since the world neither sees nor recognizes the Spirit.  
But you can recognize the Spirit because the Spirit abides with you  
and will be within you.

I will not leave you orphaned; I will come back to you.

A little while now and the world will see me no more;  
but you will see me; because I live, and you will live as well.  
On that day you will know that I am in God,  
and you are in me, and I am in you.

Those who obey the commandments are the ones who love me,  
and those who love me will be loved by Abba God.  
I, too, will love them and will reveal myself to them.”

## *Homily*

There is a different kind of grief that we are all feeling today. Life as we knew it has been upended. It's only been two months since the pandemic struck our state, yet it has felt at times like two years. Even though the stay-at-home orders are being partially lifted on Monday, those of us in the most-at-risk group, whether because of age or pre-existing condition (or both), are still scared to resume our pre-pandemic lives. We know our everyday lives are going to change permanently, but we don't know what that will look like in the end. Yet we have to carry on.

The last time we felt like this as a nation was after the September 11, 2001 attacks. Then, as now, life ground to a halt, and fear and grief were the dominant feelings. On a personal level, I remember how I felt when my father was killed in a military plane crash when I was 14, with the thought that my world had been blown apart. I knew nothing would be the same after that, yet I had to continue living.

The same feelings of fear and grief are present as the disciples have to face life without the physical presence of Jesus. In fact, Jesus describes their feelings as though they had been orphaned. I find it interesting that the gospel writer uses the ordinary Greek word, *orphanous*, when Jesus assures the disciples that they will not be left on their own after his death. Feeling orphaned after a mentor's death was a well-known metaphor in the Greek-speaking world, as the followers of

Socrates were described as feeling orphaned after his death. This tells us two things: adults can feel orphaned even when they don't have the vulnerability that a child without parents faces, and Jesus was concerned for the feelings of the disciples. Jesus is telling them, "After my death, resurrection, and return to God, I will not be with you in my physical form. But you will not feel as bereft, lonely, and insecure as children who have lost their parents. I will continue to be with you through the presence of the Paraclete, someone else who will help you when I am gone. Whenever you follow my command to love one another as I have loved you, you will sense the Spirit working within you. It is through loving others that you love God and you love me, and we will love you in return." This is our source of hope, as the writer of First Peter says. Believing that we are not alone, we can bear the suffering that comes our way because of our faith in Jesus. And this is our source of courage, the same courage that strengthened Philip to proclaim the Good News to the people in Samaria, traditional enemies of the Jewish people.

We also need to remember that orphans, those who are fatherless but not necessarily motherless, are under the special protection of God. The oldest law code in the Bible, which comes right after the Ten Commandments in the book of Exodus, states, "You shall not abuse any widow or orphan" (Ex 22:22). In various places, God is described as the one "who executes justice for the orphan" (Deut 10:18) and who is "the helper of the orphan" (Ps 10:14). Again and again the prophets condemn those who do not care for the orphan, because in a patriarchal

society, orphans have lost their primary protector, and there may be no other male figure who is willing to look out for them.

During these days of uncertainty, when some of our political leaders are not following the advice and warnings of epidemiologists, it is encouraging to hear the Holy Spirit described as “the Spirit of Truth.” The world, that is, the people who only believe what they want to believe, can’t accept this Spirit because they have made themselves blind to her presence. The Spirit of Truth not only assures us that we are *not* orphans, but she also emboldens us to take actions to protect ourselves and others who are unfairly attacked and victimized because they are following the path of truth.

The promise of the Spirit is wonderful. But we know there are times when this promise seems like empty words. The sun has gone down, the air is chill, we cannot see our way forward, and we feel deserted by the One who promised to be with us. These are the times when we have to hold on to our faith with both hands, knowing that the only way out is through this valley of darkness, fear, and grief. I’d like to leave you with one of my favorite songs of comfort when times are insecure, which is on the next page. This song, based on Isaiah 49, also contains a line from today’s gospel: “I will not leave you orphaned.” God will *not* forget us even if we cannot sense the divine presence in our lives at times like these.

So, I’ll leave you with these questions. When have you experienced emptiness and loneliness and the loss of the presence of the Spirit? How are you

coping with the uncertainty of these days? How do you console yourself in a time of grieving?

## ISAIAH 49

Carey Landry

Verse 1



1. I will nev - er for - get you, my peo - ple; I have carved you



1. on the palm of my hand. I will nev - er for - get you; I will



1. not leave you or - phaned. I will nev - er for - get my own.

Verse 2



2. Does a moth - er for - get her ba - by? Or a



2. wom - an the child with - in her womb? Yet e - ven if these for -



(Repeat Vs 1)  
2. get, yes, e - ven if these for - get, I will nev - er for - get my own.

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