

6 Sunday Easter A 2020 A Reflection

Today's Gospel is taken from Jesus' farewell discourse at the Last Supper during which he promised his disciples that when he would no longer be with them his Father would send another Paraclete to fill the void left by his departure. The term 'Paraclete' in this context has the same meaning as the more familiar English word, 'Advocate.' A Paraclete or Advocate at Jesus' time was a person who stood alongside a defendant and pleaded their case before a judge, while it had a wider application that included, as one commentator describes it, reference to "someone you would want standing beside you when you are in a difficult situation."

Further, 'Paraclete' has a secondary meaning that comes from the Old Testament. The Greek verb *parakalo* was used by the 3rd century BC translators of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek to translate the Hebrew word for the Lord consoling Israel in its darkest days of the Babylonian Exile. Moreover this use of *parakalo* continued into the Greek New Testament. For instance, Luke used it when referring to Simeon awaiting the consolation of Israel in the scene of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. Thus we have the line from Bianco da Siena's hymn to the Holy Spirit, Come down, O love divine, "O Comforter draw near, Within my heart appear, and kindle it, they holy love bestowing."

The *Catechism* speaks of the Spirit's presence in terms of 'Divine self-effacement,' pointing out that the Spirit does not draw attention to himself. "We do not hear the Spirit himself. the Spirit makes us hear the Father's Word." The *Catechism* then points to how we become aware of his presence, that "we know the Holy Spirit in the movement by which he reveals the Word to us and disposes us to welcome Jesus in faith."

Christian tradition has described the Spirit's presence as dynamic, capturing it by means of such phrases as the Spirit's guiding light and his purifying love, the dynamic action of one who "unveils Christ to us," and who maintains his presence with us.

Along these lines it has been said that the awareness of the Holy Spirit is given in one's consciousness of "the firmness and effective power of one's living faith." The person who seeks to draw closer to Jesus and obey him enjoys the Spirit's "caring presence and renewing action" that accounts for the steadfastness and on-going strength of their Christian commitment. The Spirit's presence is best thought of as being God along-side the Christian. Think of a driving instructor's presence to the learner driver. It is a different mode of presence to a teacher standing before a class.

While some individuals may be granted, in the description of one theologian, "a religious experience which commences a decisively new sense of the powerful presence and working of the Holy Spirit in their lives, which may involve one or more charismatic gifts," it can be said that every committed Christian experiences in various ways the Spirit's "caring presence and renewing action," without them necessarily enjoying a vivid or dramatic experience of the Spirit."

With the feast of Pentecost approaching, we might seek to reconnect with the Spirit's presence in our lives, praying that we might grow in openness to his "self-effacing" presence. Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle there the fire of your love.

Fr David Willis OP