

Homily for the 6th Sunday of Easter

When I was a child in second grade, I remember learning lots from the nun who taught us religious education – CCD we called it back then. Among the many things I remember sister telling us was that God was a Trinity. She said He was only one God, but that He was made up of three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And because He loves us so much, God wants to hear from us in prayer. So after class I remember going home and trying to talk to God in prayer. But then, I wasn't sure who to pray to. Should I start out talking to the Father, and then move to the Son and then the Holy Spirit? If I just say, "God" will He know that I mean all three of them? I was confused.

Well, this week we turn to our three Scripture readings and we here all about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the Gospel Jesus says, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth". And then we hear, "you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you." Hearing such words gives me flashbacks. It still seems difficult to understand how the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three persons, while still being one God. I guess that's why we call it a mystery of our faith.

Over the past five weeks since His Resurrection from the dead, Jesus has been appearing to His disciples, showing them that He has triumphed over sin and death, promising the same to those who follow after Him. However, after they just start getting comfortable with having Jesus back with them, He announces, “a little while later and the world will no longer see me.” In fact this coming Thursday we will celebrate Jesus going back up to heaven to be united with his Father. And we call this holy day of obligation the Ascension of the Lord.

But before Jesus ascends, He promises to send them another “advocate” – another “helper” who will always be with them, to guide them into truth. Jesus knows that His disciples are going to feel abandoned, like orphans even, and that they’re not going to know what to do next. It’s like math class: it’s one thing when the teacher does the math problems on the board. It’s a completely different thing when you take the book home and try them on your own. The same with the Apostles: Jesus knew that they loved Him. But at the same time, He also knew that they would need help in continuing to follow Him and in keeping His commandments after His Ascension.

Now, when we hear that word ‘commandment’, we might think of the 10 Commandments – the Law given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. It’s mostly a list of things we shouldn’t do – don’t steal, don’t bear false witness. But those are not the only commandments Jesus is talking about here. He’s also referring to the greatest commandment, which is the summary of the whole Old Testament Law: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

And what does that mean for us? It means the 10 Commandments aren’t “it”. The Christian life isn’t just about avoiding a list of “no-noes” in life. If that’s all we attempt to do, then a big empty space, a spiritual pothole, will be left behind. And since “nature abhors a vacuum”, its only natural that something will come along and fill that empty space up in our lives. That something else often are temptations to fall back into the same sins we were trying to avoid in the first place.

Rather, we have to try and fill that spiritual pothole left wide open by keeping the 10 Commandment – by not sinning. And we have to take the actions of love by doing good deeds – we have to purposefully try to do good things that demonstrate our love for God and for neighbor. We have to go out of our way to grow in virtue – keeping Jesus’ commandment to love just doesn’t happen by accident.

And my friends, this is where the Spirit that Jesus promises to send today becomes so important. Why? Well, it's the Spirit, the other Advocate, who gives us the strength to continually love our neighbor, and to continually do the good deeds that show this love. It's the Spirit, who gives us the strength not to settle for mere comfort, but to strive for holiness and greatness in our lives.

To close, St. Augustine, once said, "the Spirit is the bond of love, who binds the Father and the Son together and is the full expression of the love which flows between the Lover and the Beloved." If we are going to remain in Jesus to keep His commandment of love, then we need the Holy Spirit. We need Him who is love to bind us to God and to one another. And we'll be talking more about this in the Sundays to come, as we dwell more on God the Holy Spirit. And so we ask you, "Lord, send down your Spirit upon us, to renew the face of the earth". God bless you.