

# Homily for the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

May 16-17, 2020

Readings: Acts 8: 5-8, 14-17; 1 Peter 3: 15-18; John 14: 15-21

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What a time we are living in! I daresay I echo most of us when I think to myself that this Eastertide feels like a prolonged Holy Saturday. Christ is indeed risen, but our joy is shadowed because we are still scattered, locked in fear inside our homes. Our experience perhaps has been more like Mary, or Peter, or the couple on the road who have given up and headed for home—if we have encountered our risen Lord this Easter it has been largely a solitary event, or if we are so blessed, an event we shared with the family under our roof. We have not been able to rush back to the community to report or share in the Easter joy.

And yet...“I will not leave you orphans.”

These words from Jesus’ long farewell discourse have rolled through my mind the whole week since I read them. They leapt from the page as I went over the reading. Washing dishes, taking solitary walks, putting head to pillow, they followed. In prayer... “What do you want to say in this homily? What shall I write?” *“I will not leave you orphans.”*

Listening to the friend who calls to say her dog just died... reading posts or texts asking for prayers for someone just dropped off at the emergency room who may have Covid... or just got furloughed... fielding posts, texts or Zooms from people saying they’re suddenly struck with anxiety or sadness they can’t explain... *I will not leave you orphans.*

Jesus is speaking passionately, intimately to his companions, absolutely stuffing them with teachings to prepare them for what’s coming. To give them, now, the meaning and hope he knows they cannot yet understand. Only afterwards, looking through the lens of lived experience and seen miracles will they look back and say, “Ah, so *that’s* what he meant...”

We are so like Philip—“show us the Father and then we will believe.” And like Thomas—“We don’t know where you are going; how can we know the way?” Like

them, we are dangling in the mid-air of uncertainty, of apprehension, of having no control. And like them, we will only know the outcome of this experience after it has all happened. But because we can look back at their experience, at Jesus' death and resurrection and all that followed, we can know that death has been overcome by Life, that Jesus has indeed risen, that God wins. Truly, we are not left orphans. Even in lockdown we can be Alleluia people.

How? We, too, have that Paraclete—that Advocate, Counselor, Comforter and Giver of Strength Jesus promised. We know this: the challenge, as always, is to move that knowledge from our heads to our hearts. To experience that deep knowing that lets us really trust the promises and the Lord who made them.

For me, this has required what you might think of as several forms of deep listening.

The first call to deep listening is a call to be present to what is going on. To give up resistance: not to draw a sword to fight like Peter, nor to run away like the disciples. Instead, we need to listen to what is going on inside our hearts, our minds, our bodies. To sit with the Lord and just see what's going on—then to relax any stiff muscles, to release our objection to the situation, any resistance to sadness or whatever. We don't need to be carried off by these, but resting our head on the Lord's heart we can let these guests sit down at the table and notice who's there. "Ah, there's frustration. And over here is cabin fever. Here on the left is sadness."

Then we can turn these guests over to the Lord. In whatever manner of prayer draws us, we can release these afflictive feelings into the light of Christ's love and healing. Or, in a less formal prayer, as we breathe in, we can imagine the light and warmth of Jesus' love filling us, warming us, holding us. And as we breathe out we can release that light and warmth into our world, our home, our environment. We can open our hearts up to accept the gifts and comfort the Lord has promised and so wants to give us... And by being in that imagined place and sharing what we receive, we can make of ourselves a prayer. And in that moment we can know in our hearts that indeed we are not orphans.