

HOMILY St Bartholomew's Easter 6, 2026

In the Gospel of John, Jesus' last speech (before his arrest, trial and death) is quite a long one: it goes for over three chapters. It's mainly concerned with the question of what Jesus' departure will mean for his disciples. And again and again that speech circles back and back again to the role of the Holy Spirit, the place the Holy Spirit will have when Jesus departs and returns to the Father.

That of course is the situation that we're in now in terms of the church's year. We're in the last Sunday before the Ascension, this coming Thursday, the end of the Easter season, and ten days later we will be celebrating the feast of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit according to St John represents the personal presence of Jesus in the time between the Lord's departure and his future return. In other words, the Spirit makes Jesus present in our hearts, and in our community life together.

In our Gospel reading today the Spirit is described as the one who ensures we are not left as orphans, that we are not abandoned. The Spirit brings Jesus' own consolation into our hearts, indeed brings Jesus' own presence into our hearts and lives. In the old King James Version, which some of you may be old enough to remember, the Holy Spirit was always referred to in these chapters as the 'Comforter'. These days we tend to say the 'Advocate'. And that's because no single word really captures the role that the Holy Spirit has in relation to Jesus. The word is actually 'Paraclete' but that's not part of our normal vocabulary in the church, except for a few old hymns. Yet the Catholic Church still uses it.

But the Paraclete sea robes a particular role of the Holy Spirit: with departure of Jesus. The Paraclete functions for us as a mother figure, a guardian who is with us when Jesus leaves us, who who brings us his nurture and consolation and reassurance. The Spirit makes the holy Trinity present to us, a presence that begins and ends with love.

As well as love, the Spirit also stands for truth, revealing the truth about what the world is really like, and who and what God is. And that truth is closely bound up with love, because the deepest truth about God is that God is love, and loves each of us, and loves the church, and loves the world he has created. The deepest truth about God, and the deepest truth of our lives, is love.

Elsewhere in these chapters the Spirit, the Paraclete, is also the Advocate, the one who is there to defend us when we are attacked, when other people misunderstand us or and make false accusations against us. And, at the same time, the Paraclete is also the Teacher and Guide, the one who leads us into all truth, who guides us in our lives to live with wisdom. All this too is part of love, God's love for us, present in our hearts through the Spirit, the Paraclete.

The Spirit is closest to us when things are tough: in our own lives, in the life of the church, in the life of the world. And that connects us to our second reading today.

1 Peter is about a community in crisis, a community that is struggling to live in the context of empire and in particular the Roman empire. It was very hard to be a Christian or indeed to be Jewish under the Romans and their colonisation. The Romans were quite tolerant when it came to religion but the one thing they wanted is that everybody should worship the gods associated with Rome itself. And of course that's the very thing that Jews and Christians could not do because of their belief in one God and one God alone to be worshipped.

So the apostle here is giving encouragement to the Christian community and telling them how they need to live their lives. And the message is quite countercultural. They are not to live as the world lives with, with worldly values. Love is to characterise their lives, love and gentleness and truth telling. They are not to seek revenge but to repay abuse with blessing, the very opposite of what the world believes. They are to be people of gentleness and forgiveness and reconciliation, people who seek for the good of others, even those who have wronged them.

That capacity to speak the truth in love can nevertheless bring suffering and persecution on those who believe.

But all of this for 1 Peter is grounded in Jesus himself. He was a truth teller yet gentle and respectful and he suffered on the cross. So he is an example for us that we are to follow. Yet he is far more than an example. He is also the Saviour. Because it's the resurrection that makes all the difference for 1 Peter, as it does for St John and all the other New Testament writings.

The resurrection enables us to live out of love and respect for others: in tolerance and kindness and forgiveness and goodness. Precisely the resurrection enables us to do that because it is the one great, definitive act of love. It is the sign of the triumph of good over evil, of love and kindness and forgiveness over vengeance and cruelty and violence.

And the resurrection makes it possible for us to live that way, to be like Christ. Because it is already at work within us and among us. It is not just an event of the past but already working to transform us, already offering us a radical new way of being.

The resurrection transforms us through the presence of the Holy Spirit, who makes the risen Jesus real for us in our lives: the Paraclete who comforts and sustains us, who enables us to speak truth to power, to fight for justice and for peace; and who draws us more and more into the resurrection life and love of Jesus.

Mthr Dorothy