

5 Easter – Year C

John 16:12-22

Today’s Gospel reading is part of Jesus’ final teaching to His disciples before His arrest. This section begins in chapter 13 and ends with Jesus’ prayer to His Father in chapter 17, just before He and the disciples go out to the Garden of Gethsemane where Judas will betray Him. During that last evening with the disciples, Jesus does what we all try to do when we know we’re going to be gone from those we love—he tells them those things that are most important for them to remember, and He tries to comfort them.

- During that evening Jesus washes the disciples’ feet and gives them the new commandment to love one another as He has loved them. He tells them, and us, to follow His example of service and love for each other.
- He encourages them not to worry because in His Father’s house are many rooms, and He is going to prepare a place for them and will come again and take them to be with Him. When Thomas says, “*we don’t know the way*”, He replies that indeed they *do* know the way—that He Himself is “*the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*”
- Jesus also promises that He will not leave them “orphaned” and without comfort, that He will send the Holy Spirit to be with them. He calls the Holy Spirit the “Helper” and says that the Father will send the Spirit in Jesus’ name to teach them what they need to know, and to remind them of the things that He had told them. And then Jesus bestows His peace—not the peace that the world gives, but the abiding and in-dwelling peace that can come only from the Lord: “*Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid,*” He says to them. (John 14:27)
- Then our Lord tells them that He is the true vine and those who abide in Him are the branches and will bear much fruit; that apart from Him we can do nothing.
- Jesus continues His teaching with warnings about how the world hates Him and will hate His followers, too, but that the Holy Spirit will bear witness about Him, and that those who were with Him from the beginning of His ministry must also bear witness about Him. He says that He is telling them these things to keep them from falling away in the times of persecution that will come after He leaves them.
- Jesus seems to be drawing His teaching to a close when He says that He has much more to say to them but that they can’t bear the rest of His words now. Perhaps they need time to absorb all the things He has already told them; perhaps they are overwhelmed with information. But the rest of the

information can wait because the Holy Spirit will come and provide the teaching that will be needed when the time comes. For now, Jesus turns to the emotional needs of those who are with Him in their impending sorrow.

Now Jesus speaks of His departure, but in a way that seems like a riddle: “*In a little while you will see me no longer; and again a little while; and you will see me.*” The disciples are mystified. Although Jesus has previously warned them about His coming death and resurrection, they have always had trouble understanding or accepting this news. We who live after His death and resurrection can see this: He was going away into death, and He would return to life. We remember the stories of Jesus’ interactions with the disciples after His resurrection—meeting Mary in the Garden and Peter and the other disciples in the upper room; walking with the two disciples to Emmaus and eating breakfast on the seashore with others. On this last night before His death, He tries to comfort the disciples ahead of time with the promise of joy after sorrow.

But we may also relate His going away and coming again to His ascension and return in glory at the end of the ages. After the forty-day period of appearances following His resurrection, our Lord ascended to the Father and sent the Holy Spirit to be His presence among His people. The Spirit comforts and guides us, as Jesus promised His first disciples.

Like those first disciples, who struggled to understand Jesus’ going and coming, and what that might mean for them and for the world as a whole, we also struggle to understand and to find comfort in our Lord’s promises. In times of loss, we wonder how we can ever feel comforted. In the face of senseless violence, we cry out for God’s justice and peace. When we’re lonely or in pain, we lament with the psalmist: “*How long, O Lord?*” In days of fear and anxiety, we long for the protection of our Lord’s mighty wings of mercy.

Our Lord is absent for a time, but He has not abandoned us. As He promised so long ago, He is with us where two or three are gathered in His name in worship. He is present in the words of Holy Scripture read and spoken, truly present in the bread and wine of Holy Communion through which He affirms His promise of forgiveness, and with us in the voices of the psalmists whose words we speak and chant in our weekly liturgy. Our Lord also draws near to us in our daily prayers and Bible readings, in the beauty of a sunrise, the hug of a friend and the unexpected act of kindness offered by a stranger.

Before He ascended to the Father, our Lord Jesus told His disciples he would be with them always. His promise was to them, and to all who put their trust in Him and await His return. Christ died to save us from our sins. Christ is risen from the dead to give us eternal life. Christ will come again to take us to Himself, so that where He is we might be also. Our Lord is and was and will be with us forever. This is most certainly true!