

6th Sunday of Easter

Do you love God? Or do you fear God? Many people were taught from childhood that God is an angry judge. If you sin, God will punish you. Such people follow religious practices because they fear the consequences if they do not. Other people have learned that we have a God of love. If you sin, God will forgive you. Such people follow religious practices because they want to experience more of God's love.

There is a word in today's gospel that could be used to support either view of God. It is Paraclete. It's a word that means something like "lawyer". "Paraclete" is a title that Jesus gave to the Holy Spirit. But in today's gospel Jesus says that the Father will send "another Paraclete" - as if Jesus himself is a Paraclete as well. If you fear that God is a harsh judge, then you may think you need a lawyer at the Last Judgment. Perhaps Jesus performed that role for the disciples. They made a lot of mistakes, and perhaps he was defending them before God his Father. If so, he may have promised that the Holy Spirit would defend future disciples after he was gone.

Or the Paraclete may be a different kind of lawyer. Perhaps God really is more merciful and loving than we realize. The Paraclete may not be someone who stands with us before God, but someone who stands with us before the rest of the world. This seems to be the view that Jesus took at the Last Supper. He was going to leave the disciples soon, but he said, "I will not leave you orphans." He would give them "the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept." Jesus promised to give us this Spirit if we love him and keep his commandments.

This past week we celebrated the sacrament of confirmation with many of our youth and adults. In this sacrament they receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They will then bear witness to their faith. They will be able to do this because of the Paraclete, who will stand with them, as if they are on trial against the world.

My brothers and sisters, all of us who have been confirmed have received this gift. We all face times when other people do not share the same values that we do. They may ask us to do something that we believe is wrong, something that may hurt another person, or hurt society. We know that we should say no to sin, but sometimes we do not. We are afraid. We are weak. But we always have strength upon which we can call. We have the Paraclete in our midst.

Perhaps we go through life with both views of God. At times the fear of punishment helps us avoid sin. At times our love for God motivates us to do what is right. At all times we have the Holy Spirit, our Paraclete.