

"Orphans" is the metaphor Jesus uses. "I won't leave you orphans," he says. You get the feeling that to be orphaned in Jesus' day must have been a terrible misfortune. Not only would you lose the people who loved and cared for you, but you would never have substitutes. Whoever would now care for you just wouldn't love the same way, if they loved at all. For a child to be orphaned must have seemed the most crushing of misfortunes. At the last supper, Jesus assured his adult followers that that misfortune would never happen to them.

To be orphaned is still a sad occurrence. There is nothing like a strong family for raising healthy children. Of course there are other ways to be orphaned. Some are made orphans of work when a job they have come to trust vanishes. Some are orphans of financial stability, when some unforeseen disaster claims their savings. Some are orphans of the Church, when they become disillusioned with a minister or with a God whom they couldn't see where they wanted him to be. Jesus, knowing that his own death will cause a great tragedy for his disciples, assures them they will not be orphans.

And yet, when Jesus died, when he met a horrifying death on a cross at the hands of those who did not believe, when he breathed his last breath, I'm sure the apostles felt like orphans. I'm sure they felt abandoned, they felt that the one in whom they trusted had now left them alone, with no one to love them in the same way. I'm sure they felt like we feel when we become disillusioned with someone we love, or abandoned by what made us secure. I'm sure they felt like orphans.

But they were not orphans, nor ever are we. For with his last breath Jesus breathed forth into the world a Spirit, a Spirit he calls another Paraclete--a Spirit who would be an advocate, a mediator--the Holy Spirit. He calls this Spirit another Paraclete to reveal to His disciples that Jesus Himself plays that role. He pleads our cause, he is parent to us. And in his absence we will have another. Not one who could never love us in the same way as the first, but one who loves us exactly as the first because together they are one, they are God.

My sisters and brothers, we may feel like orphans when something goes wrong. Some people feel like orphans for years. But we have a parent, a creator, who loves us like no one else can, one who will never abandon us. Like a loving mother or father, our God understands when we are hurt. If the pain seems never to go away, we have the consolation that it will never be worsened by the loss of the one who loves us most. That one is another Paraclete, the Holy Spirit of God.