

BEYOND GOODBYES

A reflection on the 6th Sunday of Easter (year A) by Marc Caissy
Ac 8:5-8; 1 Peter 3: 15-18; Jn 14:15-21
May 20-21 2017

We've all experienced them, those times to say goodbye. Either we're left behind or we're the ones who must leave. Who wants to feel sad and lonely, or leave loved ones feeling worried or abandoned? Exchanging photos and tokens allays fears, provides comfort and keeps bonds alive, often despite long distance or long time separations.

But imagine leaving and being closer than when you were physically present. What if your presence could not only REMAIN WITH those left behind, but actually LIVE IN them? Isn't that what Jesus is referring to in today's Gospel when he says, "On that day, you will know that I am IN my Father, and you IN me, and I IN you."?

Jesus continues, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments... He/she who loves me will be loved by my Father" (Jn 14:21). Do we lose the Father's love if we don't? In the new and eternal Covenant, relationships can always be restored, but would a caterpillar be expected become a butterfly without time in its cocoon? The Lord's unlimited patience trusts us to mature spiritually, to grow in our capacity to "keep our conscience clear", "to account for the hope that is in us", as St. Peter writes in today's 2nd Reading.

In John's Gospel, Jesus refers to MY commandments, In one of his books¹, Jean Vanier writes that, "essentially, they are the commandments of love", such as:

- ⑩ being compassionate and forgiving, loving your enemies;
- ⑩ living the beatitudes, serving each other.

In a word, the commandments of Jesus call us to love each other as He loves us in order to manifest Him to the world. How many of us feel they can rise to that challenge by effort and willpower alone?

Jesus anticipates our limitations. While he challenges us to love, he promises us "another Advocate", i.e. a helper, a BFF or buddy in today's language. "This is the Spirit of truth, adds Jesus. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be IN you" (v.17). This is the amazing gift the Lord's friendship offers us. That's what friends do!

What is the Gospel telling us? God is not a *computer APP* that, with a quick click, instantly cures our life's woes. He isn't a fundamental force that simply radiates blindly, without any interaction. We are offered much better: a personalized love, a deeply intimate friendship. This is indeed Good News. We're invited to be friends with our God, to enter into a mutual relationship which, when nurtured and enriched, enables Jesus' love to live on beyond goodbye in his disciples and those who are "lost and poor in spirit and who cry out to God" (j.v. 260).

By the way, this is how the founder of L'Arche differentiates between the "*other*" Advocate (v. 16) and the Holy Spirit. The Spirit implies movement, as in "wind" or "breath", or inner enthusiasm. This is the holy enthusiasm that urges Phillip to proclaim the Christ in Samaria,

¹Vanier, Jean, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*, Novalis, 2004, p. 259-262.

where, according to today's 1st Reading, many wondrous signs backed up his words. When Peter and John laid hands on the Samaritans, they received that same Spirit (Ac 8). "The "other" Advocate, on the other hand, takes away the anguish of loneliness while generating presence and security, peace and communion. *Spirit* and *Advocate* therefore appear as two aspects of the Holy Spirit who inspires and urges us forward, but who also holds us, carries us, loves us and dwells in us as we dwell in Him."²

This incredible web of loving and being loved, of giving and receiving, of the vital interaction between friends, happens every time we keep Jesus' commandments in our daily encounters with others. How dumbfounded we'll be at how literally Jesus meant, "As you did it to one of the least of these who are my family, you did it to me" (Mat 25: 40). In addition, prayer in its countless forms is always available to the disciples of Jesus. In a particularly intimate way, though, we encounter the Risen Lord in the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

When we lovingly enter into that "mystery of faith", we anticipate the unimaginable encounter that "God has prepared for those who love him" (1Cor 2:9). In this life, we will never totally reach the peace and happiness we yearn for. But when we lovingly welcome Jesus in the Bread broken and Wine poured, we already share in this infinite happiness. We can already have a glimpse of what it means to be embraced by an infinite love that never abandons friends, AND, more than that, unites us more closely to one another as Church, local and universal.

Yes, it's time for Jesus to say a final goodbye, but, beyond goodbyes, as the heartfelt 1980s song³ claims, "Love lives on". ALLELUIA!

² *ibid*, p. 260-61; in this work, JV uses the Greek word "Paracletus" instead of the modern English word "Advocate".

³ Love Lives on Beyond Goodbye, lyrics by Joe Cocker, 1987