

“Comfort My People”

I am sure that some of you remember a hit song from the 60s that has become a pop music classic— “What the World Needs Now is Love.” There is no doubt that love is what there just is too little of. But in the midst of war; massacres in grocery stores, schools, hospitals, cemeteries and churches; the ongoing COVID pandemic; threats to our democracy; and so much more I think we also need some comforting.

We need the spiritual equivalent of mashed potatoes, meat loaf, vine ripened tomatoes, iced tea, vanilla ice cream, and other comfort foods. We need soothing music, hugs, moderate temperatures, gentle rain showers, and more hugs. We need less conflict and more patience. We need less talking and more listening. We need less news and more walks in the garden. We need less caffeine and more naps. You get the picture.

Ten days before Pentecost as Jesus prepared to ascend into Heaven he assured the confused and anxious disciples that he was not leaving them all alone. Rather he would be sending them what in Greek is called the *Παράκλητος* (paracletos). This word has a number of translations. Most often in scripture *Παράκλητος* is translated as advocate. Advocate here means a mentor or a lawyer. The *Παράκλητος* argues on our behalf. It encourages us in our trials and tribulations. It is a supporter and backer of our cause and our inner spirit. The *Παράκλητος* believes in us as much as any relative, partner, or friend. The *Παράκλητος* never waivers in her support and belief in us. Certainly the troubles that the disciples/apostles will encounter in the coming days and years will require a presence that believes in them and supports them and can help them argue their case.

Another meaning for *Παράκλητος* is counselor. This is an aspect that Jesus refers to when he tells them “the Advocate, the Holy Spirit...will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” The *Παράκλητος* will serve as one whose job it is to help the apostles remember what Jesus taught them and strengthens them in times of trial.

The *Παράκλητος* can also mean healer. It can help heal the wounds of life in this unforgiving and rough world. It helps heal our wounds from within; as it opens new pathways for our energies, gifts and dreams. The *Παράκλητος* is like a spiritual antibiotic or a homeopathic medicine that works in unknown ways. It may not be FDA approved, but the healing power of Holy Spirit for broken hearts is greater than anything from the pharmacy.

Another aspect of the word is the one I think we need right now, which is comforter. While all of the aspects of the *Παράκλητος* are certainly agreeable and welcome, there is something about receiving comfort, especially in these times, that strikes a chord with me.

We want the comfort and companionship of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised to the disciples. We know that there are others who walk with us on our journey—friends, family, fellow believers—but there is something about the heaven-sent Holy Spirit unfailingly walking at our side, taking our hand, holding us up when we stumble, and giving us hope when all seems cloudy and forlorn, that helps us get through dark and troubling times. It is the Holy Spirit that God has sent us to comfort, console, and guide us.

A companion in the treadmill of our daily lives is another comforting aspect of the Holy Spirit. The *Παράκλητος* as promised to us by Jesus helps us through the mundane aspects of life. The parts of life that may not try our spirit in a grand way, but may just grind us down in the unending relentlessness of it. When we feel alone, lonely, alone in crowd, or adrift we are comforted knowing the Holy Spirit is our constant companion.

The following poem “Let Evening Come”¹ by Jane Kenyon points me to the consoling and comforting companion aspects of the Holy Spirit.

Let the light of late afternoon
shine through chinks in the barn, moving
up the bales as the sun moves down.

Let the cricket take up chafing
as a woman takes up her needles
and her yarn. Let evening come.

Let dew collect on the hoe abandoned
in long grass. Let the stars appear
and the moon disclose her silver horn.

Let the fox go back to its sandy den.
Let the wind die down. Let the shed
go black inside. Let evening come.

To the bottle in the ditch, to the scoop
in the oats, to air in the lung
let evening come.

Let it come, as it will, and don't
be afraid. God does not leave us
comfortless, so let evening come.

Even in the most lonesome moments in the dead of night, we are not without an advocate, comforter, companion, counselor, and healer in the person of the Holy Spirit. She is with us no matter the circumstances of our daily lives. She is with us no matter the pain, confusion, and anxiety we feel. The *Παράκλητος*, the Holy Spirit is with us all the days of our lives.

God does not leave us
comfortless, so let evening come.

¹ Jane Kenyon, *Let Evening Come: Poems* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 1990).