

“Mama Said, ‘There’ll Be Days’”

I have been thinking a lot about the people who have been mentors and guides in my life. You have heard me talk about my maternal grandmother, my uncle Johnny Mac, my parents, my college choir director, and others. So many people have been important to me in forming me to be the man I am today. The African saying is, “That it takes a village to raise a child.” Truly I think there have been a host of nearly biblical proportions of mentors, teachers, friends, guides, companions, advocates, aids, comforters, to get me through life to this stage. Undoubtedly there will be more whom I have not yet met who will provide me guidance and care in the future.

In today’s gospel reading Jesus is preparing his disciples for the time when he will no longer be with them. This is part of a longer discourse where Jesus is trying to communicate to the disciples that he will be crucified and thus return to the Father in Heaven. But so they, who are already fearful, will not become more anxious, he says, “I will not leave you orphaned.” Even though he will be gone from their sight he will ask the Father to send another advocate to be with them.

The Greek word Jesus uses that is translated as advocate is *paracletos* (παράκλητος) or Paraclete. This Greek word literally means to call alongside or to call in aid. In *Koine*, or common, Greek it is used often in legal terms such as an advocate or defense attorney, if you will. It is also used to mean comforter, counselor, and consoler.

As important as it is to understand the many nuances of the word paraclete it is important to notice a word we might simply glide over. When Jesus promises the Paraclete it is not just any Paraclete but “another.” That is the one Jesus will ask the Father to send is one who will serve the disciples as Jesus has. For Jesus has been their advocate, comforter, counselor, and consoler. Just as Jesus has walked alongside the disciples so this new advocate will be the paraclete, the one called alongside, the disciples.

I am sure the disciples while comforted were also a bit mystified. If they are thinking a bit too literally as they, and we, often do, they might think, “What do I need with a defense attorney? I have not committed any crimes.” But as Jesus continues to speak with them, they might find comfort in realizing that Jesus is sending another one to be as he has been to them. That would indeed give comfort in the uncertain time they were experiencing. Remember this scripture, as was last week’s, is part of John’s Last Supper narrative. The disciples have been getting a lot thrown at them from foot washing, a new commandment, Judas being revealed as betrayer, and much more. Now Jesus in his role as *paracletos* is consoling his disciples as they prepare for a world without their beloved teacher.

It should also be clear that Jesus is not just speaking to his contemporary disciples the band of eleven now that Judas is gone. Jesus is speaking to his disciples beyond that group and beyond that time. He is giving comfort and counsel to you and me and everyone else who has sought to follow him over the past 2,000 years.

Through most of this passage Jesus uses the second person plural pronoun you when speaking. But in the last sentence he changes from “you” to “they.” Instead of referring to just those around him at the moment he is projecting outside the group

and into the future. He says, “They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” He is telling the disciples that it is not just them who will receive the Paraclete or have the love of the Father and of Jesus. Rather it *anyone* who keeps his commandments. Jesus who had been specifically consoling and counseling his immediate disciples now reaches out across time and place to all his disciples yet to come. He is essentially setting up this Paraclete relationship with anyone who reads these words and is willing to follow him.

What an incredible gift. Jesus knew that the anxiety his disciples were feeling in the moment was not the only time any of his followers would feel such fear and stress. He knew, as The Shirelles sang, “There’ll be days like this.” That is days of pandemic, of the unknown, of the every changing, of uncertainty, and anxiousness. Jesus knew that we would need more than a bit of belief and some inspiring words to get us through these times. He knew we would need his love, the Father’s love, and the companionship of one who was always on our side comforting, consoling, counseling, advocating, and guiding. We would need one who would be beside us all the way.

That is how it is with Jesus. He has not left us as orphans. We have generous and loving parents in God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Even in these days of uncertainty around COVID-19 we are not alone. We have Emmanuel—God with Us.

But you say that you do not feel it. You do not experience this companionship. That is because the world is crossing out God. The talking heads on television who are trying to amp up ratings, the naysaying blogger whose only goal is to get more followers, or the cranky neighbor whose own fear has blocked out the love of God. We must turn them off, go into our place of solitude and open our hearts to the one who loves us not for his own sake but for ours. Whether it is your garden, bedroom, prayer corner, or in the kitchen with a cup of tea, or go to that place of peace and allow Jesus through. Pray “Holy Spirit come” or “Lord Jesus be with me” or “Open my eyes and ears to see and hear you.” Whatever might work for you that clears away the noise of this broken and bereft world.

Do not expect instant healing. This can take time and patience. We have lots of time right now. It is also a good time to cultivate patience. Remember Jesus also said, “Ask and it shall be given to you. Seek and ye shall find. Knock and the door will be opened.” We rarely receive if we do not ask, seek or knock. We are to be active participants in this with Jesus keeping his commandments and loving him.

Be your own mentor, advocate, counselor and paraclete in this search. In the process you will be opened to the one whom the Father sent to those lonely and fearful disciples some 2,000 years ago. The one who walks with you through trial and anxiety and leads you on to God’s holy and life-giving peace.