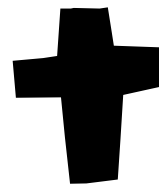




Bringing Home the Word



6TH SUNDAY OF EASTER May 29, 2011

“I Will Not Leave You Orphans”

By Diane M. Houdek

As Jesus is preparing his disciples for his departure from their everyday life, he tells them, “I will not leave you orphans.” It may have been odd for these men who followed Jesus to be referred to as orphans. But even today, psychologists speak of the effect that it has on adults when both of their parents die and they realize that no matter what their chronological age, they are, in fact, orphaned.

Clearly Jesus and the disciples both realize that their relationship is a close one, like that of parent and children. They—and we—are dependent of God for everything. The thought of being abandoned or left orphaned, the sever-

ing of this spiritual tie, is as frightening as it would be for a small child left by its parents.

The image of the orphan would have been far more significant to a first-century audience. In their world, as in the world of the Hebrew Scriptures, the orphan and the widow were metaphors for the most vulnerable in society. In a patriarchal culture, a woman or child without the support of an adult male was without protection or provisions.

In our contemporary American society. Children are absorbed into the social system if the parents aren't able to take care of them. A system of foster homes has replaced the institutional orphanages that were once common. But for all the changes and advancements in our modern world, we know that children are still dependent and vulnerable.

The more we become what someone has termed a global village, the more we become aware that the plight of the orphan is still very real worldwide. Babies in Africa left orphaned by the ravages of AIDS, children in Eastern Europe orphaned by war, baby girls in China marginalized by a one-child-per-family policy and a preference for male children: We hear of these things almost daily in the news and in heart-rending appeals for help.

All these images go through our minds when we hear Jesus' words of comfort to his followers: “I will not

leave you orphans.” If we believe those words, and if we do indeed rest in the ongoing care of the Spirit of God, we have a responsibility to use that assurance to transform a world in which too many people are still orphaned by circumstance, by tragedy, by neglect and violence.

The call of the prophets to care for the widow and orphan still rings through our world. There are many ways to do this, both direct and indirect. Foster parent programs are always looking for stable families to volunteer to help reduce the load of children who are not receiving adequate care and socialization. International adoption programs are becoming more and more prevalent. Programs such as Heifer International work with women and children in developing countries to make them self-sufficient. Craft groups knit warm clothing for children in Russian orphanages. Organizations make it possible for people to support children in other countries financially through a regular contribution.

Those of us who have known stable and loving families, those of us who have known firsthand what it is to be orphaned, but especially all of us who have been held in God's loving arms must do all we can to make sure that each and every person hears the words Jesus speaks: “I will not leave you orphans.” ✚

SUNDAY READINGS

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

The word of God reaches out beyond the city of Jerusalem. The preaching of Philip leads to conversion and the gift of the Spirit.

1 Peter 3:15-18

With “gentleness and reverence” we are to give a reason for our hope in God to those who ask.

John 14:15-21

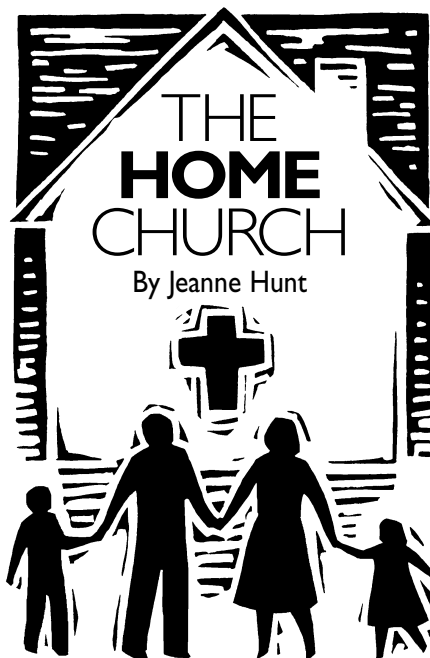
Jesus promises to send the Spirit of truth, who will continue Jesus' presence and teaching on earth.

REFLECTION
QUESTIONS
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REFLECTION

- How can you open yourself to a devotion to the Holy Spirit?
- Why does Jesus tell us that loving him means following his commandments?
- Where do you need Jesus' peace?
- How has the Holy Spirit revealed Jesus in your life?
- What hope do you find in this passage?

PRAYER

Come Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts
of your faithful
and kindle in them
the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit
and they shall be created.
And you shall renew
the face of the earth.



The celebration of the Feast of the Ascension has become something of a conundrum in the Church in the United States. It is traditionally celebrated forty days after Easter, which places it on a Thursday. It commemorates Jesus' final farewell to his disciples and his ascension to the Father's right hand. At the same time, he commissions his disciples to go forth and continue his work on earth.

It's not surprising that such a momentous feast is a holy day of obligation. The unimaginable new life that begins on Easter and is sealed with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost gets its shape and form in this great commissioning for ministry.

A number of years ago, however, a few dioceses began to transfer the feast from the traditional Thursday to the following Sunday. Today, only six dioceses or archdioceses continue to celebrate the Ascension on its proper day.

Whether you celebrate this feast on Thursday or Sunday, perhaps this week is a good time to take a deep breath and think about the momentous task that Jesus sets before his followers when he says, "Go, make disciples." If we're having trouble making time to go to Mass on a Thursday, how will we ever fulfill this greater calling?

Who was the best advocate you ever had? Perhaps it was a coach who believed in your abilities, a teacher who taught you to dream big, a grandparent who saw you as the most wonderful little person God had ever created. These people made a difference in our lives. They stood up for us, encouraged us and led us in right paths.

The greatest Advocate—the Holy Spirit—is still doing all those things for us. Jesus tells us that he is not leaving us orphans. He gives us the Holy Spirit to take care of everything we need until the end of time.

When we allow the Holy Spirit to take up residence in our soul, suddenly we know a peace beyond what the world can give. We have the strength to walk away from things that are harmful to our body, mind and soul.

This Advocate is waiting for you to allow him into your being. He wants to abide in you and that means you have to ask him to enter your life. Many of us received the Sacrament of Confirmation and never realized that while the Spirit was given to us, we never fully accepted Him. Today's Gospel is a powerful reminder that this Advocate can't wait to inspire us.

WEEKDAY
READINGS

Monday	Acts 16:11-15; Jn 15:26—16:4a	Thursday	Acts 1:1-11/Eph 1:17-23/Mt 28:16-20 Ascension
Tuesday	Zep 3:14-18a or Rom 12:9-16/Lk 1:39-56 <i>The Visitation</i>	Friday	Acts 18:9-18; Jn 16:20-23 <i>Charles Lwanga and companions</i>
Wednesday	Acts 17:15, 22-18:1; Jn 16:12-15 <i>Justin</i>	Saturday	Acts 18:23-28/Jn 16:23b-28