

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.*

Today we celebrate Mother’s Day. To all our mothers, whether here on earth or in heaven, we thank you for the gift of our life. Our birth was a very sacred time for both our mothers and fathers, when, by a miracle of nature, and of God, new life was created. We may ourselves be mothers, or care for children, and know what a blessing and responsibility that is.

Mothers are most often the nurturers and comforters in the family, especially when a child is very young. They provide unconditional love when we are most vulnerable. And until we reach our teenage years, we often view our mothers and fathers as perfect and the source of all knowledge and authority. The fifth commandment says, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12). Let us today give thanks for mothers everywhere.

Today’s short but powerful gospel passage is appropriate for Mother’s Day. Jesus reiterates his favorite theme: love. He also promises the Holy Spirit, also known as the Advocate, counsellor or Paraclete. And Jesus emphasizes the intimate unity of Jesus, God, the Spirit, and the believer – the ‘three-in-one’ with the addition of us.

The passage begins and ends with love. In verse 15 Jesus declares that if his disciples love him, they will keep his commandments. We may ask, “What commandments?” Unlike, say, Matthew, nowhere in John’s gospel does Jesus command us to go the second mile, turn the other cheek, or render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s. But Jesus, in John’s gospel, gives only a single commandment, and it’s found in the chapter just before today’s reading: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (13:34-35). He repeats this later in the chapter: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this; to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. (John 15:12-13). We see, then, the repetitive, circular emphasis on love.

In less than 24 hours after Jesus speaks these words, he will come to the end of his earthly life, and be crucified. So in our gospel passage, he wants to assure his disciples that they will not be abandoned, even though they will not see him again in his earthly form. Jesus gives them both an instruction and a promise:

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.”

There are some things to note about this instruction and promise. If we love someone, we will naturally want to live our lives in sync with them; in this case by keeping the commandments. Then Jesus explains that the world in general cannot receive this Advocate or Spirit of truth, because it neither sees him nor knows him. The word used here for the Spirit is from the Greek – Paraclete. This word paraclete is only used in John’s gospel. The Greek word, παράκλητος (*parakletos*) is made up of 2 parts: *para* meaning ‘beside,’ or ‘next to,’ and *kletos* meaning ‘called,’ or ‘invited.’ So paraclete literally is “one who is called” or “one who is invited beside.” The word implies that we may call upon the Spirit, the paraclete, to be with us in our times of need. The Holy Spirit is also sometimes described as ‘the comforter.’

Jesus says the Advocate or paraclete is being sent because “I will not leave you orphaned.” When we think of someone being orphaned, we think of a child losing his parents. But we can feel orphaned at any age, after both

our parents have died. We are to see Jesus as a loving parent who wants to protect his children from the sadness of his death.

Jesus assures the disciples that they will see him again, and then they will know that “I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” When our own parents have died, we know that their memory lives on in us, and also in our DNA. We are comforted because we know that in some way, they are always with us.

While Jesus walked the earth, his ministry was limited to one location, and to one person, himself. On his death, his disciples are given the Advocate, the Spirit, and change from being students, to full, mature revealers of God’s love. And this happens not just to the first disciples, but to all those who come later; those who never saw the historical Jesus.

The gospel writer John, insists that present believers have no disadvantage in comparison to the first believers. Everything they were taught, and they experienced, is available to us now. Jesus, when carried up to be in God his father, will continue to love us and to make himself known to us.

That means there is no distance between us and God. Abundant life is available for living from this moment into eternity. And we have the Advocate, Spirit and comforter, to be with us always.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN