

## 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, Year C John 14:23-29

<sup>23</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, “Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. <sup>24</sup> Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me. <sup>25</sup> “I have told you this while I am with you. <sup>26</sup> The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that (I) told you. <sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. <sup>28</sup> You heard me tell you, ‘I am going away and I will come back to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. <sup>29</sup> And now I have told you this before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe.

### Introduction

Our passage today is taken from the “Farewell Discourse” of Jesus contained in five chapters of John (13:1-17:56). In other words, we have but a few verses which are an integral part of a much larger passage. Accordingly, the Discourse can be outlined in a number of ways, though three main parts are fairly clear:

- The first part (13:31-14:31) focuses on Jesus’ departure and discusses the disciples’ relation to Jesus and their conflict with the world.
- The second part (15:1-16:33) develops these same themes, moving from the relationship of Jesus to the disciples, using the figure of the vine and the branches (15:1-17), to the conflict between the disciples and the world (15:18-16:15), and on to a promise to the disciples of joy in the future after the sorrow of this time of separation (16:16-33).
- In the third major part Jesus prays to his Father (17:1-26).

Throughout, the overall theme is the Father’s presence with the disciples and the Son’s and Spirit’s roles in mediating his presence. As a way of establishing a context lets first consider a wider view of at least a portion of our passage by considering the text surrounding Jesus’ departure (13:31-14:31).

### Jesus’ departure and return (13:31–14:31)

Once Judas has left the light (13:1), Jesus begins to speak to his own, his dearest friends. Various disciples — Peter, Thomas, Philip, Judas (not Iscariot, possibly Thaddeus) — carry the discussion forward by the questions they pose. This enables us to break down the whole, hopefully to see it more clearly, by dividing it according to the characters who ask the leading questions.

- *The first section* (13:31–35) is simply an introduction. Judas’ departure has set in motion the events of the passion. Jesus will be glorified, God will be glorified, since God’s presence as infinite love is about to be fully manifested in Jesus. Jesus will leave, and that absence (or is it presence?) is the problem underlying this whole section. As he leaves, he leaves behind his one essential commandment: “Love one another” (v. 34). It is a *new* commandment because this mutual love must be modeled on something new — on the love that Jesus shows for his disciples. Mutual love must be the sign, the indispensable sign, of their discipleship.
- *Peter* (13:36–14:4) moves the discussion further: “*Master, where are you going?*” (13:36). This appearance of Peter permits the evangelist to present a bit of tradition shared, seemingly, by the whole church, that Jesus predicted Peter’s denial (13:37–38). Yet, though Peter would deny his Lord, he would also follow him in death (v. 36).

In the subsequent verses (14:1–4), the basic problems that control the rest of the chapter are touched upon. The disciples are troubled (v. 1, as also v. 27) — and so later will be John’s own community — because of Jesus’ departure. In response, Jesus insists on the necessity of faith, stating that he goes to prepare a place for them and will return to take them with him (v. 3). This sounds very much like a promise of Jesus’ future return as visible Lord of the world (the technical term for this is the *parousia* = coming). The early church awaited this with fervent hope (1 Thess 4:16–18). But John’s Gospel will now reinterpret such a futuristic approach. Jesus has not passed over a bridge that was subsequently blown up; there is a way to him, and they already know it (v. 4).

- So *Thomas* (14:5–7) asks, “*How can we know the way?*” Jesus’ answer states that Christian hope is not in a method, not in a procedure, but in a person. Jesus himself is “the way and the truth and the life” (v. 6). Through and in Jesus, one *comes* to the Father, *knows* the Father, *sees* the Father.
- *Philip* (14:8–21) seizes on that final phrase to ask: “*Master, show us the Father . . .*” (v. 8). One can hear the sigh of weariness, almost of failure, in Jesus’ voice: “*Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*” (v. 9). And the discussion continues, pointing to the perfect union of Jesus with the Father: both his words and his works are the Father’s (vv. 10–11). With this, Jesus turns his attention to the disciples. They, too, will do the works that Jesus has done because he will respond according to their petitions, so that God will be manifested in the Son. The disciples’ love will bring from the Father another Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, to remain with them always (v. 16). In this sense, Jesus will come back; they will not be left orphans (v. 18).

At this point, the reader’s head should be spinning a bit. What is going on? What seemed to be a statement of Jesus’ future return to take his disciples to places prepared for them (14:3), a movement carrying believers into some future and unknown paradise, has subtly turned around like a boomerang targeting in on the place from which it was originally launched. Jesus goes, but he returns; and the dwelling places he prepares, which seemed to be located out there somewhere (v. 2), will be found, rather, within the believers themselves (vv. 20–21). In some way, this return is connected with another Paraclete (cf. 1 John 2:1, where Jesus is called the first one) who takes Jesus’ place as both advocate and revealer.

It is this movement — Jesus’ departure and consequent return through the Paraclete — that explains the “little while” in verse 19. Just as the disciples see Jesus now, so they will soon know of his union with the Father, which union he will share with them. The disciples who love will be loved by both the Father and Son, who (through the Paraclete?) will reveal himself to them (v. 21). All they could have hoped for in the future will soon be now.

- This provokes the *Judas* (not Iscariot) sequence (14:22–31). How strange that Jesus should speak of all this Spirit return, indwelling, union with Father and disciples, when what Judas and the others were expecting was a visible return in majesty accompanied by a fearsome display of celestial fireworks. “*Master, [then] what happened that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?*” (v. 22). Jesus’ answer almost avoids the question as it merely insists on what has already been proclaimed. He and the Father will come to those who love and will dwell with them (vv. 23–24). (This, for John, is the all-important coming, *parousia*, of the Lord.) This coming is directly related to the Paraclete whom the Father will send to instruct and to remind. John’s community is clearly a Paraclete community, confident that the Spirit, Jesus’ Spirit, is with them still, reminding them of, and interpreting, Jesus’ words, instructing them with the words and wisdom of the Lord. Surely this Gospel is filled with Paraclete reminders and instruction.

The fear and distress of people awaiting a delayed future return (vv. 1, 27) must give way in John's community to the peace that is Christ's gift, to the joy that is theirs at the knowledge that Jesus has returned to the Father who is his origin, "greater than I" (v. 28).

## Commentary

Verse 23 begins with, "*Jesus answered and said to him.*" Jesus is answering the question raised in v. 22 by Judas (not Iscariot): "*Lord, how is it that you will reveal (emphanizo) yourself to us, and not to the world?*" This question comes because Jesus has just said that he would love and **reveal** himself to those who have and keep his commandments -- those who love him (v. 21: *Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.*").

Contrasts are given:

- us versus the world
- those to whom Jesus reveals himself vs. the world
- those who keep commandments and love Jesus vs. those who don't

The two related answers to the question given in our text are (1) through the Word and (2) through the Paraclete.

### Jesus (and the Father) Come Through The Word

*"Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me"* (vv. 23-24)

What does it mean to "keep" (*tereo*) Jesus' word? The basic meanings of this word in TDNT are:

1. keep watch over, guard
2. keep, hold, reserve, preserve someone or something
3. keep = not lose
4. keep = protect
5. keep, observe, fulfill, pay attention to

NOTE: that "obey" is not one of the meanings (although perhaps implied by "observe").

Brian Stoffregen's paraphrase of *tereo* as "hold dear" or perhaps, "consider important" seems to capture the sense of the passage. This interpretation goes beyond mere obedience. One may detest the words that one is hearing and obeying. One may detest the one giving the orders, but to avoid punishment, one obeys them. In contrast to this, phrasing it, "Holding Jesus' word dear," implies having a positive attitude towards that Word and the Word-giver. That is, *wanting* to hear and obey it out of love for the speaker.

Loving Jesus and "holding dear" what Jesus said and did are inseparable. In chapters 14-15, twice "love" comes before "keep" (14:15; 23) and twice "keep" comes before "love" (14:21; 15:10). In addition, "keeping" is used with "commandments" (*entole*) (14:15, 21; 15:10) and with "word" (*logos*) (14:23, 24; 15:20). Loving Jesus and "holding dear" his word and commandments are inseparable.

The connection between love and keeping (i.e., holding dear) the commandments is illustrated by Jesus himself in v. 31. He is doing what the Father has commanded him, *so that* the world might know that he is loving the Father. The purpose of Jesus' obedience is witnessing.

The results of loving Jesus and keeping his word in v. 23 are:

1. The Father will love that one

2. The Father and Son will come to that one
3. The Father and Son will make a dwelling with that one

The promise we have from Jesus is that he (and his Father) will be present to those who, out of their love for Jesus, keep (i.e., hold dear) his word. These are those to whom Jesus will reveal himself.

In contrast to these who love Jesus and keep his word, Jesus next talks about “*Whoever does not love me does not keep (hold dear) my words*” (v. 24). Presumably these non-lovers and non-keepers do not receive the Father’s love or the abiding presence of the Father and the Son. This is understandable if the love and presence comes through the Word that one “holds dear” or “considers valuable,” those who do not have this relationship with the Word will not have the presence of the divine in their lives.

The subject changes in the next phrase: “...yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me” (v.24)

Keeping the “words” in the v.23 is now phrased “hearing the word.” This phrase elucidates the “us/our” in v. 23 – the Word that brings the presence comes from both Father and Son. The three cannot be separated: Word, Father, and Son.

### **The Promise of the Paraclete**

Perhaps it best not to translate the Greek word *paraclete* because there are too many possibilities. While the literal meaning of the related verb (*parakaleo*) means “to call to one’s side,” usually asking the other for help, the noun took on a legal meaning as “helper in court”. Thus we have translations like “counselor,” “advocate,” or “one who speaks for another” as well as the too general translation of “helper”.

This word occurs five times in the NT. It is used in 1J 2:1 to refer to Jesus; and four times in John’s Farewell Discourse (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

If the Paraclete is a “helper in court,” whose helper is it? Clearly the Paraclete has a role as helper to the disciples (and, now, our helper); but there are also indications that it is Jesus’ helper. The Paraclete comes to speak to us for Jesus. In 14:26, it will teach us everything and remind us of all that Jesus has said to us. In 15:26, it will testify on Jesus’ behalf. The Paraclete comes to speak to us on behalf of Jesus.

In our text, the Paraclete will teach us “everything” and remind us of “all” that Jesus has said to us. (In 16:8; its topics are more specific: the truth about sin, righteousness, and judgment.) It is not too much of a stretch to say that the Paraclete “helps” us to hear Jesus’ word, which, as noted above, brings the continuing presence of Jesus and his Father to us. The Paraclete reveals Jesus to us, but those without the help of the Paraclete will not properly hear or remember the word of Jesus’ presence.

Still there is something puzzling in Jesus’ words: “*Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. I am going away and I will come back to you.*” Going away and coming back? What kind of sense does that make?

- (1) Start with the pre-Jesus world. God the Father had been with the people for all ages. The First Testament tells about this over and over. Throughout these ages, God the Father remained unknowable in very important ways. Moses is not allowed to look directly. God says, “*I will set you in the hollow of the rock and will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand, so that you may see my back [really it says “so that you may look upon my hindermost quarters”]; but my face is not to be seen. To see God directly would destroy a human being.*” (Exodus 33:18-23).

- (2) To close this gap, God decided to show us everything about himself in a way we can understand. He spoke out his very self and he used a Word that left nothing unsaid. Humanity is the language he used, and Jesus was the Word spoken in that language. Now God can be known because we can know Jesus.
- (3) Jesus dies, resurrects and ascends to the Father from whom he came. Are we abandoned? No. Just like the Father did, Jesus speaks out his own very self in another Word that leaves nothing of himself unsaid. That Word is the Holy Spirit.

This Spirit is the full reality of the divine/human being called Jesus, and is already the very interior Spirit of God. We are to be closer to Jesus and to the Father than the apostles were!

If you and I say yes to this Spirit, we will know Jesus just as sheep know the voice of their shepherd. In knowing Jesus we will know the Father. We will find him in the Mass, in the Great Eucharistic Sacrament, in prayer, in the people around us. We will be side by side with each other, in the closest possible presence of the God of love.

### Notes

**14:25** *teach you everything and remind you of all that (I) told you*: The Holy Spirit recalls what Jesus has said, taking it deeper and farther into the memory and consciousness of the disciples (*cf.* John 2:2, 12:16)

**14:26** *Advocate*: The English word “paraclete” simply transliterates the Greek word that basically means “advocate. This word has legal connotation. Literally it means “one who stands by the side of a defendant.” The 1956 *Jerusalem Bible* translates paraclete as “advocate,” but the 1985 *Jerusalem Bible* uses “paraclete!” The 1970 *New American Bible* translation used “paraclete” but the 1986 revision replaced it with “advocate!” Other translations prefer the word “counselor” (*New International Version*) or “comforter” (*King James Version*). What does the evangelist himself indicate the meaning might be? The “paraclete” performs at least three functions or activities. (1) It is the continued presence of Jesus on earth after Jesus’ departure to heaven (14:12, 16). (2) It is a truth-telling spirit (14:17; 16:13) that testifies on behalf of Jesus and in defense of him. It affirms that Jesus was not a shameful failure but rather the beloved of God, a faithful and dutiful Son. (3) It reminds them of things that Jesus said (14:26) and reveals things Jesus was unable to convey (16:12-14). On another note, this is the only place in the NT where the expression “Holy Spirit” is found

**14:27** *Peace*: the traditional Hebrew salutation *shalom* wishing an absence of war, conflict or tension; but Jesus’ “Shalom” is a gift of salvation, connoting the bounty of messianic blessing (*cf.* Isa 9:6-7; 52:7; 57:19; Hag 2:9; Acts 10:36; Rom 14:17)

*let your hearts not be troubled*: This is an exact repetition of words from Jesus in v.1 and v.27

**14:28** *if you loved me*: Brown (654) sees this seeming conditional not as an implied “you do not love me” but rather their love – at this moment – is not as it ought to be. Their love is possessive rather than something they freely give.

*the Father is greater than I*: This passage was one of the central arguments of Arius in claiming a subordination of Jesus to God – others used it to argue against the divinity of Jesus. Cyril of Alexandria, Ambrose and Augustine explained that *as a man* the Incarnate Son was less than the Father. But it must be remembered that John is not constructing a Christology or even a theology. He is likely speaking about “glorification.” Jesus is departing, signifying that his work is nearly complete. Now he will be glorified with the glory that he has with the Father before the world existed. This should be the cause of the disciples’ rejoicing – because then Jesus will glorify his disciples with eternal life (17:2)

## Sources

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