



**Georges Rouault, Christ and the Apostles,
1937-38**

Jesus said to his disciples: *"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 always, the Spirit of truth"* (John 14:15-17a).

**6th Sunday of Easter ~ Cycle A
May 25th, 2014**

Reading 1: Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. The crowds with one accord listened eagerly to what was said by Philip, hearing and seeing the signs that he did, for unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks, came out of many who were possessed; and many others who were paralyzed or lame were cured. So there was great joy in that city. Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Responsorial Psalm: 66:1-7, 16, 20

Lector: Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;
All: sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise.
Lector: Say to God, 'How awesome are your deeds? Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.
All: All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name.
Lector: Come and see what God has done; he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.
All: He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There we rejoiced in him,
Lector: who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations: let not the rebellious exalt themselves.
All: Come and hear, all you who respect God, and I will tell you what he has done for me.
Lector: Blessed be God, because he has not rejected our prayer or removed his steadfast love from us.

Reading 2: 1 Peter 3:15-18

...in your hearts, sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is within you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.

Gospel Reading: John 14:15-21

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. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 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.

Homily

A little lesson in human cognitive development may offer an analogy and some parallels to our spiritual dilemma in comprehending what Jesus is telling us in today's Gospel. In babies, there must develop the capacity to envision what is absent or gone away. A French psychologist, Piaget, noted that very young babies didn't have the idea that if an object disappeared from view, that it still existed. For those younger than six months of age, it wasn't merely out of sight – it was also out of mind – and no longer existed. If you place a toy in which they're interested under a blanket, even if there is an obvious 'lump' under it, they do not pursue it.

But by his first birthday, he will probably try to brush the blanket away to find the toy. And even though we begin to develop our cognitive equipment in infancy, it takes longer for us to develop 'object constancy' on an emotional level – to trust that people who are important in our little universe are reasonably predictable, that when they leave, they will come back to us.

We begin to make differentiation as babies when we learn to smile by age two months or so, a sign that we are bonding to those around us. And along about 8 months of age, comes the 'stranger anxiety' phase, where we recognize the difference between those who are familiar to us and those we don't know.

The child learns to walk, begins to explore the world, and compares the differences between those who are familiar and those who are 'other.' S/he may venture out, but then returns every little while to 'check in' with the parent, establishing that kind of predictable base. When distressed, the parent soothes the child and teaches him/her in time how to sooth himself and others. This becomes the foundation for the person to know how to deal with stress and fluctuations in emotions going into adulthood and

later. And, of course, there are many experiences that can influence the degree of a confidence we have about those on whom we count on in our world.

We don't generally learn to walk without first crawling, although a few children seem to 'leap' through their motorical or mental steps rapidly so the stages are less distinct. But in general, we are put together so that we must master certain problems before we are capable of more complex actions. In Corinthians, we are given a picture of how this works spiritually, in that when we were children, we thought as children, we behaved as children, and we spoke as children; and when we became adults, hopefully we put away childish (childlike) things. Jesus understood this aspect of being human and the years that we have.

He told us he would not leave us as orphans. This may suggest Jesus as a kind of parent but the concept was also found in rabbinic writings with respect to the loss of a teacher by his disciples. He also said that there is a level at which some of us have hope and expectation and will see him, while others do not because they have not received him. In case of us as adults, even if we had good and stable childhoods, some of us still struggle about trust and safety with those around us, and in regard to a God who cannot be seen or directly perceived through the senses, it is a long stretch.

This human developmental analogy can only go so far, but it may help bridge the gap between things we can directly perceive and those we can't, but in which we come to trust are present for us. He said he was coming to us, not 'coming again,' but only 'coming.' We see there is the coming and remaining with us of the Advocate, the ***Paracletos*** [Greek] or ***Advocatus*** [Old Latin] or ***Consolator*** [Vulgate] – the Holy Spirit – and the coming and remaining with us of Jesus.

The *paraclete* is depicted as a witness to us of God (John 15:26), as an instructor or teacher (14:26), as well as a friend who encourages us (16:6f), a guide (16:13) and one who can help us discern the truth and to prove the world wrong (16:8-11). Being in Christ and Christ being in us is stressed in the 4th Gospel as a continued, intimate presence and availability of Christ to the disciple.

It is a self-revealing love that continues forever or always. Hence, it is a promise of continuity, even in the face of seeming loss. He has become a part of us and we have become a part of him in community together. As we grow spiritually, we are no longer the child for whom out of sight is out of mind. We have a continuous experience of God that is less dependent on our changing circumstances. The concept of being in Christ does not seem to resemble or fit in with the resurrection appearances, but depicts an ongoing love relationship, a theme that is most prominent in this Gospel as contrasted with the Synoptic Gospels. It pops up in some of the Epistles (Ephesians 6:24, 1 Corinthians 15:22, 1 Peter 1:8).

But we should also note the injunction to love Jesus and keep his commandments occurs three times, which seems to underscore its importance. Without keeping his commandments, we will not fully appreciate his loved. Why do some seem to perceived or be more sensitive to spiritual aspects of life and others seemingly do not have this level of awareness? This awareness can be enhanced. In loving God, we will accept the boundaries which are provided for our well-being and be true to his commandments. We subject ourselves to a certain discipline where we willingly chose to set certain limits on our own actions and behaviors. And in that process, we will be confirmed in the truth by his love to us. That settled feeling of recognition, that we know who we are, that we know the ground of being and of reality; despite seemingly contradictory information or external conflict, we can be settled within ourselves and with others. We are contained within a certain boundary of safety as we have learned from previous Sundays in talking about Christ as the Good (competent) Shepherd, the Gate, and the Way. When we are repetitively disobedient to our own consciences, when we negate or ignore what we know to be the good, we dull ourselves and will become desensitized to the effects of our actions on ourselves and others. Hence, we will not trust our deeply intuitive knowledge or recognize the Holy Spirit and her gentle leading.

It is not merely the external observance of laws or rules that brings us to spiritual maturity, but we are able to experience the influence of our choices on our relationships with the Holy and with Christ's Body, those with whom we share our deepest understandings. The Epistle of John tells us that we who have not loved our brothers lie to ourselves if we say we love God. Hence, if we wish to learn of God, we open ourselves to God's presence which is given to us in those around us.

And we're given an empirical test. It is not by our theology that we will be known, nor by the church buildings we erect, nor even the donations to charity that we make – nor any action or standard other than by our love. By our love for others, we know that we love God and he is in us.

The child repeatedly practices and learns that the parent loves him/her, when in close proximity but even when they are at a greater distance from one another and can venture out, returning to her once again. The child learns about the widening world but is assured of safety and alleviation from his proverbial fears, falls, or hurts. When he exceeds limits, he suffers and he learns. It is in staying in that close boundary and returning confidently to the parent as we learn that we progress toward self-knowledge and understanding.

We learn our own limitations and our helplessness in the world: without relationships, we cannot develop the capacity to be aware of and sensitive to others' needs. Similarly, as we practice placing ourselves in the Presence of God and learning from our ventures toward and away from the Holy, we will confidently return to him and will know him and ourselves.

From birth to death, we are never completely autonomous. We are always reliant upon the literal, physical presence of others who sustain us and later on the internalized mental, emotional, and spiritual presence of an 'other.' This 'other' is not a part of ourselves but exists apart from us and includes our spiritual community. Likewise, God is our 'other' and our sustainer. We now see in a mirror darkly, but then, we will see our Maker faced to face. As we are open to our relationships in Christian community, we will see the face of God in one another. Some have hypothesized that 'God' is merely a projection of the mind, an extension of ourselves, but in relationship with others, we learn that we are his creation, not the other way around and he will reveal and disclose himself to us.

***Jesus
Whenever we face your mysteries
Filled with wonder and love,
Please remind us of your words:
Love me and my Father
And I will love you,
And I will tell you everything.
We want to love you, Lord.
That is everything.
Show us how.
Amen.***

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