

John 14:15-21

Have you ever felt alone and abandoned? Alone happens to all of us from time to time. But abandoned. When I was 8 or 9 years old my step father would drop me off at the Somerset Hotel in Somerville and I would wait for the Somerset bus to take me to my grandparents' home in Dunellon, NJ. Usually I didn't have to wait very long but it still seemed forever. I would have my overnight bag and wait in the waiting room. No one ever spoke to me other than when I bought my ticket. I felt that I had been abandoned. The bus would come and I would take a seat on the right side of the bus so I knew where to get off. In the beginning it was a scary time for me. All on my own and being a little kid. I can appreciate how the disciple felt thinking that they were going to be on their own.

Jesus said "I will not leave you orphaned." At some point we all want and even need to hear those words. They speak directly to some of our greatest fears and challenges; abandonment and isolation, loneliness and vulnerability. To be sure there are seasons of life moments when transition, changes, and tragedies can leave us feeling like orphans. Whether spoken or unspoken the questions begin. What will I do now? Where do I go? What happens next? Who will love, nurture and guide me? Who stand on my side? What will become of me? Those are the orphan's questions. Those are the questions I imagine running through the heads and hearts of the disciples in the gospel.

It is the last supper. The disciples have been fed, feet have been washed, and the betrayer has left. It is night, dark. Jesus announces he is leaving. The one for whom they left everything now says he is leaving. Anyone who has ever loved and lost-a spouse, a child, a friend, security or hope knows the orphan's questions.

We fear becoming orphaned. That fear points to the deeper reality that by ourselves we are not enough. It is not, however, because we are deficient. It is rather because we were never intended or created to be self-sufficient. We were

created to love and be loved, to live in a relationship as persons giving themselves to each other.

Jesus said “I will never leave you orphaned”. That is the promise. Regardless of the circumstances of our lives, storms and death, separation, we have never been and never will be orphaned by God. How strange that must have sounded to the disciples. Leaving and coming. Presence and absence. That is what Jesus has set before us in today’s gospel. So our question is whether Jesus for us is a past memory or a present reality, a sentimental story that makes us feel good or a living experience that challenges, guides and nurtures our life.

According to Jesus the answer to that question is determined by love that is revealed and fulfilled in keeping his commandments. The commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves, to love our enemies, to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. Do we keep the commandments? Is our love growing, expanding and transforming ourselves and the world? If so, Jesus is probably for us a present reality and we know the fulfilment of his promise that we are not left orphaned. If, however, we are not loving so much, if we remain self-centered and isolated we relegate ourselves and each other to the orphanages of the world.

Keeping the commandments is our access to Jesus’ promise that we will not be orphaned. Keeping the commandments does not make Jesus present to us. It makes us present to the already ongoing reality of Jesus presence. The commandments do not earn us Jesus’ love they reveal our love for him, a love that originates in his abiding love and presence within us.

“I will not leave you orphaned” Over and over, day after day, regardless of what is happening in our lives that is Jesus’ promise. We have not been abandoned. Do not abandon yourselves or others to the orphanages of this world. Love with all that you are and that you have even as the Father and Jesus love us with all that they are and that they have. Amen