

Our readings today, and especially the gospel, prepare us for our forthcoming celebrations over the next two weeks which bring the Easter season to its fulfilment – Ascension and Pentecost;

The gospel this week, following on from last week, is taken from John's account of the last supper; Jesus tells his disciples he is going to leave them; he is preparing them for this ending of one chapter, by promising that another will begin;

It is the end of Jesus's earthly time with his disciples; he is going to the Father.

But also a beginning of a new relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit, called another Paraclete, whom he will send to them. Jesus is the original Paraclete, the Holy Spirit is another Paraclete. Paraclete from the Greek παρακλητος means the one who will come to them to help them, one they can call upon in any need. Imagine you were one of the disciples and you had spent time with Jesus, seen all his miracles, been inspired by his teaching, and were then told – I won't be with you any more. How would you feel? What would you need, most of all to help you look to the future? The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit; a helper, a comforter, counsellor; one who

would have the spirit of Jesus, and who would teach, and guide and inspire - in the Holy Spirit, Jesus gives us exactly what we really need, more than anything else.

"I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you for ever,

the Spirit of Truth - you know him - he is with you, he is in you.

The Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, will come to them; he would dwell in their innermost being and transform them, so that they would truly be children of God; they will do his will, keep his commandments; and they will be beloved by the Father, as his very own children.

The Holy Spirit is a free gift of God's love, but he is only received by those who want him, and those who prepare themselves for him.

This is such good news, it gives our lives meaning, it fills us with hope. We are people of hope, the Spirit gives us this hope, and if we have it, we should spread it – the direct consequence of the apostles receiving the Spirit at Pentecost wasn't that they began to spread the message, filled with the Holy Spirit they began to preach the gospel.

If we really want the Holy Spirit, if truly want to receive him, and submit to him, then he will draw us into this process, this dynamic progression which is the Paschal mystery – Jesus teaches his disciples, he dies for our salvation, he rises from the dead, ascends to the Father, and sends the Spirit who enables them to proclaim what he has taught them. Jesus says “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” – when we hear that word, we think of the Ten Commandments, do’s and don’ts, but there are other commandments as well, including the command to love, to feed the hungry, to be part of the life of the church, to share the eucharist, and to preach the gospel, to witness to our faith.

So the question that the gospel puts to us today is : Do we really want the Holy Spirit? Do we want him to come to us, and live within us? We might say “Well, yes, of course”, but our problem is that we live in the world, and the temptation is to be ruled and guided by the influences around us; in the gospel Jesus refers to “the world” as being opposed to the Spirit. He says that the world cannot receive the Spirit, since it neither sees nor knows him. The

world is opposed to the Spirit – for us today, it means those influences and attitudes that are all around us that tell us we can achieve success and be happy without God, using our own individual talents and following our own desires, striving for our own aspirational goals and objectives; whereas if we want the Holy Spirit, it means submitting ourselves to him, and recognising that our lives are not our own, but that they belong to God, and that only by following his plan for our lives can we know true fulfilment.

If we choose the Spirit, and invite him to enter our hearts and stay with us always, then those incredible words of Jesus will be true for us – the final words of the gospel today, referring to his death and resurrection, the ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit:

In a short time the world will no longer see me; but you will see me, because I live, and you will live. On that day, you will understand that I am in the Father, and you are in me and I am in you.