

John 14:15-21

¹⁵”If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This 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.

¹⁸”I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They 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.”

Sermon – Sunday, May 14, 2023 – Easter 6, Rogation Sunday, Mothers Day

”I will not leave you orphaned” These are the words from this morning’s Gospel which jump out at me. The very word ‘orphan’ is unsettling, isn’t it? It conjures up abandonment, babies left on doorsteps, mistreatment, loneliness. No one would choose to be an orphan.

To set the scene, Jesus is in the final hours of his life. He is with the disciples in the Upper Room. They have shared their final meal, their Last Supper and soon Jesus will be betrayed. He is telling his closest that he must leave them.

There was fear in the room. Very nearly panic.

And into that charged atmosphere—Jesus, in love and compassion says, “My friends, I will not abandon *you*. I will not leave you as orphans. Please stop crying, please stop being so afraid as I know you are. It’s going to be OK. Really! I know this looks and sounds bad—and some of what is to come *will be* bad, too, I admit—but in the end I will be with you in a way you cannot imagine right now.

But still, on this day when we celebrate Mothers, we may inwardly shudder at the thought of being ‘motherless’ and ‘fatherless’. We all know how it feels to lose even one parent no matter our age. So no wonder the intimate group of Jesus’ followers were desolate. They were facing a huge loss. But Jesus says ‘no’...it is not what you think

Playwright Arthur Miller once wrote that his wife at the time, Marilyn Monroe, who was an orphan, knew what it was like to be abandoned. Having been abandoned gave her an uncanny ability: according to Miller, whenever Marilyn entered a room, she was always able to pick out from the crowd those who had been orphans. There was just a certain look in the eyes of orphans that a fellow orphan could always detect at a glance. It was a glint of loneliness, perhaps, of fear, of wariness. Whatever it was, fellow orphans were able to look at one another and share a common bond of knowing and understanding.

Have you ever heard of ‘Little Orphan Annie’. It was a cartoon and movie. Here is the poem published in 1885 which was the original inspiration for Little Orphan Annie. It paints in a humourous way the bleak plight of the orphan.

Little Orphant Annie’s come to our house to stay,
An’ wash the cups an’ saucers up, an’ brush the crumbs away,

An' shoo the chickens off the porch, an' dust the hearth, an' sweep,
An' make the fire, an' bake the bread, an' earn her board-an'-keep;
An' all us other childern, when the supper things is done,
We set around the kitchen fire an' has the mostest fun
A-list'nin' to the witch-tales 'at Annie tells about,
An' the Gobble-uns 'at gits you
 Ef you
 Don't
 Watch
 Out!

Out of this came the story of Little Orphan Annie. It is 1933, the Great Depression and young a young orphan named Annie is living in the Hudson Street Orphanage in New York City. It is run by Agatha Hannigan, a cruel alcoholic who forces the orphans to clean the building daily. With half of a locket as her only possession, Little Orphan Annie remains optimistic that her parents, who left her on the doorstep as a baby, will return for her.

Annie has many adventures, but sadly, Annie's parents never return with the other half of the locket for they have died in a fire. But it seems to me, we are like Annie, waiting with her half a heart, half a locket, waiting for the return of her dear parents with the other half of the heart...to complete her...to make her whole hearted.

Here Jesus is promising us the other half of the heart to make us whole hearted. He says the Father will send an Advocate or Helper to be with them and us forever. This is the Spirit of Truth or what we now understand to be the Holy Spirit. Our Lord says

²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

He also says 'he abides with you, and he will be in you.' This speaks of a spirit not only with us but in us if we love our Lord and keep his commandments. It is a bit of a mystery...but clearly a promise that we are not left alone and bereft. We are accompanied in the closest possible way...by a Spirit which breathes within us.

So like this illustration of Annie we can throw up our arms in joy and receive the Helper, the Advocate and be confident we are never alone. Our hearts are not like Annie's half locket...our hearts are whole.

With half of a locket as her only possession, she remains optimistic that her parents, who left her on the doorstep as a baby, will return for her.

Warbucks reveals his plans to Annie, even offering her a new locket, but she declines. She explains the purpose of her broken locket and her hope that her parents will return with the other half.

And so as Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit and all the other things he talks about, he was staring into moist eyes, he was looking at Peter who could not keep his own chin from quivering with emotion, he was looking at Philip who looked about as befuddled as a human being can look. There was fear in the room. Very nearly panic.

And out of that atmosphere—and also *into* that taut atmosphere—Jesus was motivated in love and compassion to say, “My friends, I will not abandon *you*. I will not leave you as orphans. Please stop crying, please stop being so afraid as I know you are. It’s going to be OK. Really! I know this looks and sounds bad—and parts of what is to come *will be* bad, too, I admit—but in the end I will be with you in a way you cannot imagine right now. This Holy Spirit, he really will help. Through him you really will understand and you really will still be connected in a living way to me. It’s gonna be OK, my friends!”

In 1933, during the [Great Depression](#), a young [orphan](#) named Annie is living in the Hudson Street Orphanage in [New York City](#).