

I Will Not Leave You Orphans

There is nothing I find more enjoyable than to climb to the top of a mountain and take in all the beauty of creation. Excursions to the Rocky Mountains have always left me feeling that I am in “God’s Country.” It is always difficult to descend and return to everyday life. These same feelings often accompany how we might feel after Pascha and witnessing the Resurrection of Christ. Having stayed the course of Great Lent to the best of our ability and having reached Pascha night, an overwhelming joy descends upon us. Why can’t we feel this way all the time? Some may say such experiences are only meant to be temporary, a brief glimpse into the Kingdom of heaven is all we can endure this side of death. Others may say it is possible to feel this way all the time, but the temptation to run towards the more accessible joys draw us away from the Spirit of God. I think the answer lies somewhere between these two realities.

Following Pascha, the theme of *thirst* abounds as a way of saying – if you want to *live* in the Spirit of God you have to *walk* in the Spirit of God! The Church does that in a particular way of identifying every possible human condition of *thirst* possible. From Thomas who needs a theophany, the Myrrh-bearing women having lost their beloved, the paralytic who lies alone, the unmarried Samaritan women without a spouse and finally the man born blind without illumination. In each one of these conditions, we also find living water; the Holy Spirit being offered as the gift of God which alone can satisfy our various conditions of *thirst*. *“If anyone thirst, let him come to Me and drink. The one who believes in Me, even as the Scripture said— rivers of living water shall flow out of his belly.’ But this He said concerning the Spirit, Whom those who believe in Him were about to receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (Jn. 7:37-39).”* In the Gospel of John, Christ tells his disciples (John 16:7) that unless he physically departs from them He cannot send the Holy Spirit upon them. St. Gregory the Great says: *“It is as if He were openly saying, ‘If I do not withdraw My body from your bodily perception, I cannot through My Consoling Spirit lead you to spiritual vision. ‘And I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete (lit. ‘called to stand beside,’ the consoler, comforter, helper), that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of the truth, Whom the world is not able to receive, because it sees Him not, nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He abides by you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I am coming to you (Jn. 14:16-18).”* What does it mean that the Holy Spirit is a “Paraclete?” St. Gregory the Great identifies several ways of understanding this word by the various operations of the Holy Spirit. He is called an Advocate because He intervenes before the Father’s justice on behalf of the wrongdoings of sinners. He Who is of one essence with the Father and the Son is said to plead earnestly on behalf of sinners because He causes them whom He fills to do so [Rom. 8:26].’ This same Spirit is called a Consoler, because, when He prepares a hope of pardon for those grieving over their sins, He is lifting up their hearts from sorrow and affliction. The Holy Spirit is the Teacher as one who stands beside us. It is justly promised that He shall teach all things, because, unless the Spirit is present in the heart of a listener, the teacher’s utterance is useless.

No one should attribute to his teacher what he understands from him, because, unless there is an inner teacher, the one outside is exerting himself in vain (1 John 2:27).”? I would add, the Holy Spirit is the Comforter who in times of distress comes to us and brings hope when none is able to be found. If Christ did not leave us as orphans, why do we behave as if we are? The following is a quote from Jackie Hill Perry, a Christian poet/hip hop artist who creates moving graphic poems covering sexual identity and drug use based upon her conversion experience. “Prayerlessness is almost always a humility issue. We’d like to believe that we don’t pray because of busyness or that we just lack discipline and need to ‘do better.’ At the end of the day though, we’re just a proud bunch. Pride deludes us into thinking we’re self-sufficient. That our jobs supply our needs. Our relationships provide comfort. Our intellect and ambition made us successful. But in fact, everything you are and everything you have is because God rains on the just and unjust. So then, to become more prayerful, we have to be honest. Literally embracing the reality that we are perpetually *needy* even when it doesn’t feel like it.” She is saying we all have a perpetual *thirst* for God that we seek to satisfy on our own. This *thirst* can be misdirected in subtle and in not so subtle ways. The difficulty lies in the most trying times and situations when we are pressed by circumstances and seek a way to cope apart from God. As Fr. Behr points out in his commentary on the Gospel of John, the door to knowledge of Christ is the door of living as Christ lived. The *pathos* (*passion, suffering*), of Christ is His love for us which causes Him to *suffer* after us, even to the Cross, He is seeking after our hearts. It is through faith that we know we never suffer alone. It is our faith that calls us to stand alongside others in their suffering as well. Christ is co-suffering along with every human being that suffers. Christ transforms suffering through His presence, through His showing up and we are called upon to do the same for others. It is always a manifestation of a love, which illumines sorrows and shines joy upon them – this is transformative making us *Sons and Daughters of God*. “Seeing Christ, for John, does not mean to ‘see’ him as the world looked upon Jesus before the Passion, but rather to live as Christ lives, to share in the *pathos* (sufferings, pains) of Life that He *is*...” “We all experience trauma in one way or another - a difficult childhood, job loss, the loss of a loved one, dysfunctional families, illnesses, addiction, pornography, alcohol, drugs, a pandemic, isolation, war, broken families the list goes on and on. These all cause pain and suffering and unless we are able to come to know the One *carrying* us, the One Who stands alongside us. Until we realize that we are not orphaned but our loving God, the One who is continually *coming* to us, life’s burdens are too great for anyone to handle. The alternative is vice, idols, darkness and all other delusions that evil can create in order to *take away* our thirst for God. Archimandrite Zacharias says: “The Holy Spirit is that Living Water springing up to eternal life, and those who thirst for it will drink with joy. Unless we thirst, however, we have nothing in this Living Water. And that is why we are given time before our own Pentecost, a special opportunity for us to rouse within ourselves that blessed thirst for the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Having a sense of completeness apart from God is perhaps the most telling sign of our

distance from Him. Bishop Gerasimos of blessed memory wrote: “Jesus is consoling them...before he departs from them, he is already returning! I will not abandon you to become orphans without a teacher, I am coming (not I will come), I am coming now, I will never be separated from you. Not only will I send the Holy Spirit, but I myself will be with you, and so will the Father (Jn. 14:23) ... I am coming can also mean the return of Christ through the Holy Spirit, whose work also includes the formation of Christ in the hearts and consciences of the faithful. “In the love of Christ,

+Fr. Andrew

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