

“Not as the world gives do I give to you.”

Jn 14:27

In today's Gospel we hear how, following His Ascension back into heaven, Our Lord will send to us a Helper, the Holy Spirit to teach us all things. Unfortunately, we have a poor translation. The word actually used instead of Helper is a Greek word, Paraclete. The word Paraclete comes from two Greek words which mean 'to call alongside.' In other words, the Holy Spirit is more than just a helper, He is called – or sent – by the Father to be at our side, to be with us, to aid us in the work of our sanctification and salvation. Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit Himself who will sanctify us, make us holy, conform us to a greater likeness to Christ, by giving us sanctifying grace in the sacraments and by guiding us along the path of virtue.

The Holy Spirit will teach us all things, promises Our Lord. In the first instance, this is a promise to the Apostles that they will remember all that Our Lord has said and done on earth so that they can pass it on to others, by writing the Sacred Scriptures and by handing on those instructions from Our Lord that were not included in the Gospels. As St John says at the end of his Gospel, 'There are also many other things which Jesus did, which, if they were written every one, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written' (Jn 21:25). These 'many other things' are the source of what the Catholic Church calls Sacred Tradition which, along with Sacred Scripture, make up the two channels of Divine Revelation.

Then Our Lord seems to jump to a completely different line of thought. He suddenly promises to leave the Apostles a peace such as the world cannot give, a peace that would leave their hearts untroubled and unafraid, come what may. But in truth, this is a continuation of what He has just been saying. If the Apostles accept into their hearts the gift

of the Holy Spirit which will come upon them at Pentecost then not only will they be guided into all Truth (Jn 16:13) but that Truth will, in and of itself, confer peace upon their hearts.

And the reason is simple enough to understand because Our Lord Himself is the Truth that we're talking about. In other words, the Holy Spirit will pour into the hearts of the Apostles the very Person of Christ Himself.

But how on earth can a Person be poured into our hearts? The Church has the answer: in the form of sanctifying grace. Just as water can fill a vase, so sanctifying grace can be poured into our souls. And sanctifying grace is the presence of Christ Himself.

So, when we have received sanctifying grace in the sacraments – and so long as we remain in a state of grace, and do not fall into a state of sin – we have Christ Himself dwelling within our souls. And, as we know, He is both Truth itself (Jn 14:6) and Peace itself (Is 9:6). And this is the peace that Our Lord is talking about in today's Gospel.

'But,' you may cry, 'even when I have just received the grace of the sacraments I do not always feel at peace!'

Let's change the imagery. Think of sanctifying grace as a seed being planted into the soil of your soul. The presence of the seed is real, but if it is to grow and bear fruit you must water that seed. And we water the seed of grace with prayer.

It is prayer, building on the already existing presence of Christ in our souls, that can bring us the peace that Our Lord is talking about in the Gospel. This is why such peace cannot be found in the world. It doesn't come from the world. It comes directly from heaven, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of the Father (Col 3:1). This peace comes from the pouring forth into our souls of the very gift of supernatural life itself; the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit into our souls and filling us with the refreshing waters of salvation (Is 12:3) which we call sanctifying grace, the presence in our souls of God's life, of God Himself.

To be at peace in the way Our Lord is talking about, then, means to be in a continuous state of prayer, not necessarily uttering certain words and phrases or set piece prayers – although they certainly form part of what we’re talking about – but to live continuously in the presence of God, to be at all times and in all places aware of God’s presence within and around us, and to be continuously raising our hearts and minds to God in the midst of our ordinary and daily tasks, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day. As the sixteenth century Carmelite, Br Lawrence, says, we must ‘practise the presence of God.’¹ We must *breathe* the presence of God, inhaling the sweet fragrance of God’s presence with every breath we take until we can, as it says in the Psalm, ‘taste and see that the Lord is sweet’ (Ps 33:9).

This is the peace that Our Lord would bestow upon us, if we would but take up His offer. This is the peace that can leave us untroubled even when very real trials and tribulations come upon us. This is the peace that the world cannot give.

¹ *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Br Lawrence of the Resurrection. There are several editions, but try the modern critical edition translated by Salvatore Sciorba OCD and published by the Institute of Carmelite Studies (ICS).