

SPG#169, Easter 6A

April 27, 2008 – Fr. Charles Pope

Acts 17:22-31

1 Peter 3:13-22

John 14:15-21

Probably one of the most influential of all biblical scholars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was Fr. Raymond Brown a Roman Catholic priest, teacher, and writer. Brown was prolific in his writing on biblical scholarship. One of his most widely recognized works is the book entitled, The Community of the Beloved Disciple, the Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times. Brown identifies the “beloved disciple,” or “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” as a disciple of the John the Baptizer. This individual, according to Brown, was not one of the original twelve, but a follower who followed by virtue of his previous allegiance to John the Baptizer. Brown says he became a central heroic figure in first century communities that were known as “the community of the beloved disciple.” Brown also maintains that it was out of these communities that came the New Testament works of the gospel of John and the epistles of John.

Traditionally the spirituality in the gospel of John and the epistles of John is seen as more advanced and more complex than that in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

We find the words, **And the word became flesh and dwelt among us** in the gospel of John. In 1 John we find these words, **Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.**

It is this kind of words that we find in today's gospel from John. The passage begins with Jesus speaking to his disciples. **If you love me, you will keep my commandments.** And so the passage begins comfortably enough. It assumes that the issue of the disciples loving Jesus has come up before. It assumes that loving Jesus has to do with accepting his teaching, with keeping his commandments. But then in verse 16 the writer has Jesus say, **And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.** And so based on the words of loving Jesus and keeping his teachings, his commandments, we hear Jesus refer to his relationship with God the Father. And in the same verse we hear him reference "another Advocate," the Holy Spirit, who is to be sent to Jesus' followers to be with them forever.

If one hurries through a passage like this, it is predictable that one would come away warmed by the words of love and mystified by words about the Advocate. And early in the passage the writer links loving Jesus with keeping his teachings. And he links loving Jesus and keeping his commandments with receiving the Advocate, the Holy Spirit.

This type teaching is quintessential gospel of John and quintessential teaching from "the community of the beloved disciple." It challenges the reader to appreciate the loving of Jesus by keeping his teachings. And based on that loving and on that loyalty, it challenges the reader toward an uncommon spiritual life that appreciates such spiritual figures as the Father and the Advocate.

And so this is one of those “extra steps” we find in the gospel of John. Not only are we challenged in loving Jesus to love him more and to serve with our lives based on that love. But we are also encouraged toward a spiritual life that can be discerned as we love and as we are loyal.

The writer of today’s gospel seems to be sensitive to the fact that the reader is being asked to go “the second mile.” For in the next verse we find the words of explanation, **This, the Advocate, 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.**

Here then are the first words of description of the Holy Spirit found in this passage. And rather than describing the Spirit of Truth as an entity of light or some type of visual experience, the Spirit is described as “He.” In other parts of the New Testament, the feminine pronoun is used in describing the Spirit. The Spirit in today’s gospel is described as one who is not known by the world at large. But by those who know, love, and are loyal to Jesus, they know the Spirit, for he abides in them. So the implication is that by virtue of our knowing Jesus we are made aware of spiritual realities that we were not aware of before.

And this really does fit with the gospels in general, and how they portray Jesus as one to be known and loved, and as one who is a means to a larger spiritual life.

After the reader has heard about Jesus sending another Advocate, the writer anticipates that the reader may wonder what happened to Jesus. If Jesus is sending another Advocate, what about the one whom we love and follow? What about Jesus himself?

For Jesus says in verse 18, **I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.**

So, more words of love. But this time the words of love and the words about spiritual realities are combined. For Jesus is speaking about coming to his followers as a spiritual presence. And then he continues speaking in words of the spiritual and words of love,

**In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They 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.**

In concluding this part of the gospel of John, Jesus uses words of love and the spiritual to speak of the interplay between himself and the Father, between us and the Father, and between us and Jesus. I think the writer of these words goes to great lengths to love the reader with words. The writer seems to anticipate what the reader might be concerned about in one verse, and therefore answers that concern in the next. Perhaps the most poignant is when Jesus says, **I will not leave you orphaned.**

If there was no love here in these words, then words of fantastic spirituality would seem no more than a treatise on the supernatural. But because these words are grounded in Jesus' love for us and in his spiritual presence, our hearts are prepared for the interplay of the Father, the Advocate, and the Son.

In the life of Jesus, including his death and resurrection, and in the coming of the Advocate to us, and in the interplay between Jesus and us, and in the interplay between Jesus and the Father, and in the interplay between us and the Father, we are wonderfully and fantastically loved.

May these words of love and the spiritual remind us of that love. And may our hearts be softened. And may our hearts be opened to the larger life in the Spirit. Amen.