

"Help"

Text: John 15:26 - 16:4

6/2/2019

Do you like asking for help? I'll be honest and admit that I do not. My pride often gets in the way and I'd rather do most things myself. However, if what I'm trying to do is especially difficult, to the point that I'm even wondering if I can do it, I can usually be persuaded to accept help from somebody, IF they offer it. It's still hard for me to ask.

In today's Gospel Jesus doesn't wait for His disciples to ask, but takes the initiative in promising them help. That help was promised them in the Person of the Holy Spirit. For what purpose did Jesus promise help? That's what we're going to consider now together ...

As we do, we return to today's Gospel, where we hear our Lord speak to His disciples for the last time before He was betrayed into death - the night of His Last Supper with them. We all know that at that Supper Jesus instituted the Sacrament of His Body & Blood, and we also know that, sometime during that Supper, Jesus washed the feet of His disciples in demonstration of His sacrificial love for them. Later on that night, Jesus journeyed with His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane, where He was betrayed by one of them into the hands of those who would lead Him to a cross, a cross on which He would lay down His life for the sins of the world. At some time before that journey to Gethsemane, but after the Supper and washing of the disciples' feet, Jesus taught His disciples for the last time, speaking words we heard just a moment ago in today's Gospel, these words:

"When the Helper comes, Whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, Who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning."(John 15:26-27)

In this text, Jesus speaks to His disciples not only about what will happen to them in the immediate future - namely: that He would be taken from them into death, but also about what would happen to them in the farther reaching future - namely: that Jesus would be taken from them to the Father, in His Ascension. We heard about that great event just a few days ago, when we gathered here to celebrate the Ascension of our Lord last Thursday evening. Jesus speaks of that in this section of John's Gospel when He says (in verses just following those of today's Gospel):

"A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me."(16:16)

What Jesus says there is that after "a little while" He will leave His disciples to go to the Father (which, again, He did in His Ascension), and after another "little while" He will come again to them - in glory, on the Last Day. What He says in today's Gospel is that, in the time between those two "little whiles" - again, the time between His ascending to the Father and His return on the Last Day - He will NOT leave His disciples alone. Rather, He will send them a Helper - Whom He calls "the Spirit of truth" (v.26) - to comfort them in their time of need. That "Spirit of truth," which Jesus said He would send to His disciples from the Father, would provide the disciples with help.

Help for what? Help for bearing witness to Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus says in today's Gospel, again:

"... you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning."(15:27)

And He goes to say:

"These things I have said to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. They will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor Me."(16: 1-3) I

One of the ways the word "hour" is used in John's Gospel is to refer to Jesus' death o* the cross. Given that, when Jesus speaks of the disciples suffering death at a coming "hour," it would seem that He is speaking of the disciples bearing a cross in faithfulness to Him.

Jesus' warning came true for the disciples; in fact, much of the persecution of the first Christians was at the hands of their own Jewish countrymen -just as Jesus predicted in these verses (see the book of Acts). As they experienced persecution and even death for their witness to Jesus' death and resurrection, it would help for the disciples to know that they were not alone. So Jesus tells them in today's Gospel that His Spirit would go with them, joining His witness to theirs, as Jesus says throughout this section of John:

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; (14: 16) . . . the Helper, the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My Name, He will teach you all things, and will bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (14:26) ... when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; (16: 13) ... "

Jesus promised that with the coming of the Holy Spirit Jesus would not leave His disciples on their own to experience persecution by themselves; He would not leave them alone in their hour of need. He would give them His own Spirit - the Spirit of the Father, the Spirit of God Himself. When they needed the words, the Spirit would provide them. When they needed the strength to speak those words, the Spirit would provide it. That had to help.

That Spirit, of course, came to the disciples in the event we will celebrate next Sunday: Pentecost. On that day the Spirit of God - the Helper promised by Jesus in today's Gospel - came upon the Church in Word & Sacrament, as the first followers of Jesus were preached to and baptized and communed for the first time.¹ As we will hear next week, the Spirit gave the apostles the ability to speak in a variety of languages of the "mighty deeds of God" (Acts 2: 11). As we read further of those words and deeds of the apostles throughout the book Acts we see that Jesus' promise to send them the Spirit had been kept; in the presence of that Spirit they had all the help they would need.

So do we. The same Word and the same Sacraments first administered on Pentecost still today bring fulfillment of the promise of Jesus, that:

" ... when the Helper comes, ... He will bear witness about Me."
(John 15:26)

We have that Helper in our midst today, as we read His witness to Jesus in the Bible - God's written Word, and as we hear that witness preached from pulpits occupied by men called by the Spirit. It's important to stay in God's Word, because when we do we encounter the Spirit's witness of God's love for us in His Son.

The Spirit's witness in the Gospel of John tells us that Jesus ...

- works through the gift of Baptism ("water & Spirit" in John 3) to give us rebirth as children of God
- feeds us His own flesh for eternal life (John 6), after having given His flesh, and blood, into death on a cross, to free us from death (John 3:16)
- is the Resurrection and the Life, Who with His own resurrection promised to raise us up to eternal life on the Last Day (John 11), even as He is now alive and well to guide and care for us always, as our Good Shepherd (John 10)
- is the Light of the world (John 9) and the Water of life (John 4 & 7), Who refreshes and lights the way by forgiving the sins of all who ask Him (John 20)
- our Friend, Who laid down His life in love for us, calling us to love one another (John 13)

As our Friend, Jesus has promised to never leave us alone, but to give us instead a share of the same Spirit He promised His disciples - a Spirit He gave to us in the waters of our Baptism. As we live every day with the Spirit of God living inside of us, and as we listen every day to the Spirit speak to us in His Word, we know that we belong to God because we belong to Jesus. That helps.

Of course, we may not think we need that help as much as Jesus' disciples did. I mean, when was the last time you were threatened with death? Then again, that kind of persecution seems to be drawing ever nearer to us, even here in this great country. And even if it never gets that bad, it's still not easy living the Christian life. Just consider what Peter tells us to do in today's Epistle:

" keep loving one another earnestly, ... Show hospitality to one another without grumbling ... (speak) as one who speaks oracles of God; (serve) as one who serves by the strength that God supplies . . . that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." (1 Pt. 4:8, 9, 11)

Does everything you say and do glorify God? Me neither. Do you love earnestly, showing hospitality to others without grumbling? Ya, I try too, but it's hard. I need help. We all need help ... the help of the Spirit.

That help Jesus promises in today's Gospel. He has not left us alone until His final return, but continues to be with us by His Spirit, in His Word, 'til the "end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Cling to that Word folks. Put it into practice in your daily lives of love for one another, and then forgive one another for the many times you fall short of its standard. Above all, believe what it says when it tells you that you belong to God because you belong to Jesus. That's the witness of the Holy Spirit, and it's all the help you need-

- In Jesus' ✠ Name,

Amen!