

**Sermon for Exaudi, 20.05.2007  
(6th Sunday of Easter)**

**John 14:23-29**

*Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.*

*All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

*You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe."*

One of the most unpopular words in the English language  
- and I guess it's true for any language -  
is the little word "good-bye."

In English many say instead: "See you!" Or "Take care"  
as those expressions do not elicit a feeling of finality.

During the last fifteen years our family had to relocate several times,  
to another city, another state or even to another continent.

Each time we had to say farewell to friends and loved ones.

Each time we knew that we would never see those people again,  
or at least would not see some of them for a long time.

When you move you can't go by with some quick remarks.

When you leave loved ones there are no formalities.

We embrace, sometimes through tears.

We cast out clichés, often with a bit of humor,  
to lighten the atmosphere.

But in the end the word "good-bye" is bound to be spoken.

It's really a comforting thought for me to know,  
that the word "good-bye" is a shortened form  
of the longer "God be with you."

"Good-bye" condenses all the initial letters  
of the longer sentence to a single word.

"God be with you" is the best we can wish one other  
when we have to part.

In fact the farewells in many languages express the same intention.

The Spanish, *adios* means 'to God' -  
meaning that our lives are in his keeping.

In French, it is *adieux*,

which became in German in the southern dialect "*Ade*",  
and here, in the North, we pronounce it "*Tschüß*".

All these words mean the same: "God be with you".

The gospel story this morning is also a time of parting.

It is part of a section of John's Gospel

that generally is known as the Farewell Discourse.

It is set at the time of the Last Supper.

Jesus Christ and the disciples are gathered in the upper room.

Judas has already left.

On a literary level the speech is given before Easter.

Nevertheless, the issues raised

apply more to those living on the other side of the Ascension

- including us, the church of Christ.

"I am leaving," he says, "but you will not be alone.

God will send the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit,

I am also leaving you with a special legacy.

Don't be troubled. Don't be afraid.

I am giving you a special gift, the gift of peace.

A gift, which the world does not really understand."

Let's think about this special legacy.

Let's try to comprehend, what "peace" means for us.

And why this is so hard to understand.

We as human beings like to leave something worthwhile  
when we have to part.

Something, people might remember about us.

On some level this is true, when your absence is only temporary.

But when it might be permanent

for some it seems to be essential to leave anything,

that will be remembered after their decease.

Of course, there are the few exceptional wealthy people  
who will contribute their wealth to endow a professorship  
or build an art museum – providing it is named after them.

Most of us don't have that option.

But wouldn't most musicians wish to have their work performed  
by orchestras

and most writers like their books read by school children?

And preachers -

How we would love to have our old sermons discovered,  
and have them made available for future generations.

Alas, most sermons simply aren't interesting to hear,  
and their messages are applicable  
only to a specific time and situation.

That's neither bad nor good – it's just normal.

So, if we can't leave musical compositions  
or book collections,  
what will our legacy be at the end?

Jesus Christ left none of the above kind of legacies.

He had no material goods that we are aware of.

And even his clothes were gambled for  
while he was still hanging on the cross.

He left no endowments, no art museums,  
not even written documents.

In fact, Christ appears to have had nothing to leave.

Yet his legacy has come to us and continues to reach us day by day.

It is the sending of the Spirit.

The Spirit, who is powerful enough to strengthen us,  
when our hearts and minds are weak.

The spirit, showing up where and when we least expect him! Or her!

The Spirit is called “paracletos” in Greek.

The word is translated variously as Advocate,  
Comforter, Counsellor, Helper, or just Paraclete.

In a recent article in the Christian Century

James Somerville presents a unique illustration of the term.

He writes:

”When my wife puts her hand on the doorknob  
my children look up from what they are doing to ask:

’Who will take care of us?’

and she gives them the name of one of their regular babysitters.

All of them are capable, and my children enjoy their attention,

but if my wife gives them one name – Brittain -

my children leap up from what they are doing and rejoice.

Brittain reads to them, romps with them,

and makes chocolate chip cookies.”

The article concludes:

"I don't know  
that the Holy Spirit has ever been compared to a babysitter.  
But if you can imagine Jesus as a mother,  
than it may not be so hard to imagine the Spirit in this other role,  
as one who cares for the church, ...  
as one who comforts, teaches, reminds  
and, yes, sometimes even romps with the sons and daughters of God."

I like this image of the Holy Spirit as a babysitter,  
who soothes our anxieties and fears  
with words like:

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you."

I like this image as an illustration,  
as long as we don't start to behave like babies.

Most people see peace as an end in itself, a release from tension,  
the avoidance from struggle, an escape from pain.

In this way many confuse peace and contentment.

Look at all the advertisements:

we get virtually bombarded with all kinds of promises for peace  
in the forms of aspirins, laxatives, legal and illegal drugs,  
all kinds of diversions.

We have been so pampered that at the slightest pain,  
or provocation or indication of boredom /

we are urged to pop a pill, take a drink,  
buy this or that to overcome our discomfort.

But this kind of ease or respite  
must not be confused with the peace, that God offers.

I recall the story of a little girl,  
who was taking her first train ride with her parents.

As night descended, the mother took the girl,  
and placed her on the upper bunk of the sleeper.

She told her little one that up there she would be nearer to God  
and that God would watch over her.

When the voices of the adults fell silent in the car  
and they all were just about to doze off

the girl suddenly became afraid and called softly,

"Mommy, are you there?"

"Yes dear," came the response.

A little later, in a louder voice, the child called,

"Daddy, are you there, too?"

"Yes dear," was the reply.

After this had been repeated several times  
one of the passengers sharing their sleeper car  
finally lost his patience and shouted loudly,  
"Yes, we're all here, your father, your mother,  
your brother, and all your aunts and cousins,  
now settle down and go to sleep!"

There was a moment of silence and then, in hushed tones  
a little voice asked, "Mommy, was that God?"

Jesus, in offering peace, does not say, "I'm here,  
the Holy Spirit's here and God is here, now be at peace!"

We won't get peace automatically by simply desiring it.

The peace of God is a gift.

It does not come with promises of a better life,  
but peace comes in the midst of present life to make it better.

Let's face the truth.

Jesus has never preached the idea of a pampering God.  
God does not offer us a rocking chair  
and a cup of coffee, with sweet music in the background.  
Just the opposite!

We have to say Good-bye to loved ones.

We are not spared pain and suffering.

Instead, Jesus says: "Follow me!"

He says: I have been in the dark before.

I have been through hell. I go with you again.

This is the peace that Jesus has left with his disciples.

It is his legacy.

It is a gift we cannot give to ourselves.

It is God's gift to us.

It is this Spirit that allows us  
to see hope beyond what we know is possible.

It is a peace that invades the closed circles of our private worlds  
and says, "Do not be afraid."

It is the Spirit of peace that comforts the mother  
whose 14 year old autistic son comes in last place at the track meet,  
but she gets him there nonetheless.

It is the Spirit of peace that holds up those  
who care for their elderly mothers and fathers

suffering from debilitating illnesses  
and yet they manage to get them up, get them dressed and fed.  
It is the Spirit of peace that leads hands of those who feed the hungry  
and change the bed pans in a hospice.  
It is peace in the midst of death and life.  
This is the peace of God,  
that passes all our attempts at understanding.

Hear and receive today the legacy of Jesus Christ:  
"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you."

AMEN. – or, as it is the same:  
Good-bye – God be with you.!