

Reflection for Sixth Sunday of Easter

Since the advent of the new translation of the scriptures we have got used to hearing our gospels start with the words *“at that time”*. It is intended to make us think about the setting and context of the gospel we are about to hear. Today, *“at that time”* refers to those few hours which followed the Last Supper before Jesus was arrested. Treachery was in the air and Jesus was talking about betrayal, about the cup of suffering which he must face, and about his being taken forcefully from them. *“At that time”* the apostles were on edge, anxious and frightened, confused and uncertain. Jesus offers them words of solace and re-assurance. He will *“ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth.”* *“I will not”*, he says, *“leave you as orphans.”*

What a strange thing to say to grown men, the same age as himself or even older! *“Orphan”* is a very precise term referring to helpless children bereft of their parents with no-one to support and look out for them, unable to provide for their own needs or care for themselves, cast onto a hostile world, vulnerable and open to exploitation. So, an unusual choice of word to describe the apostles' predicament. That word *“orphan”* is an insight into how Jesus saw his disciples, how he thought they would flounder after his crucifixion, how this little band might fall apart. The word *“orphan”* is an insight into how the apostles felt that night and how they struggled to cope at the time of his suffering and crucifixion.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the coming of the Holy Spirit for the mission of the Church. On the day of resurrection, Easter Sunday, we see Peter and the others encounter the risen Jesus and come to an understanding that he was indeed risen from the dead, but they remain confused, timid and afraid of the hostile world. There is no going out to others, no sermons, no missionary activity. They have all the appearance of being left *“as orphans”*. It is only when the Holy Spirit comes upon the apostles on Pentecost Sunday that they recover their courage, their sense of purpose and direction and are no longer helpless and vulnerable.

As we face up to the challenges of these uncertain times for the church, specifically here in Halifax but in the western world in general, we may feel all the confusion, apprehension and uncertainty that the apostles felt after the Last Supper. But let us also remember that Jesus has not left us *“as orphans”* but has sent us *“another Helper, to be with us for ever, even the Spirit of truth.”* And so, let us look to the future with confidence and like the apostles have the courage to embrace the challenges.