

Today's gospel reading follows on directly after last week's gospel. We find Jesus with his disciples still in the upper room having eaten their last supper together. He is continuing his farewell discourse.

Jesus has spoken the words of comfort and reassurance to them:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

And then he says, “If you love me you will keep my commandments.” This statement, and a similar one at the end of this passage: “They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me”, form a pair of brackets. Jesus has already given them the New Commandment “to love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

These statements frame the text that is within them. Jesus is going away, and he continues to teach his disciples and reassure them. He will ask his Father, and says, “The Father will give you another Advocate to be with you for ever.

They will not be alone, because the Father will send them another helper. Someone who will teach and guide them, comfort and inspire them, and intercede on their behalf. In fact, the Advocate (or Holy Spirit) will carry on where Jesus has left off.

Jesus is preparing his disciples for the days ahead. He speaks in riddles, as far as the disciples can see. “In a little while the world will no longer see me...” What does this mean? Why won't we see you? And if we don't see you, how can we see you again? Jesus reassures them that he is coming back, and that they will see him again; he lives.

We know what Jesus is talking about, because we live after the events that Jesus is talking about: his crucifixion and resurrection, but this is immediately before those events. The disciples still do not understand what Jesus is saying to them.

We know that the Advocate, known to us as the Holy Spirit, came to the disciples at Pentecost. As fellow believers, we know that the Holy Spirit continues to be with us now. He teaches and guides us, comforts and inspires us, and intercedes for us. As we begin to think about life after lockdown the Holy Spirit is here for us.

After the Prime Minister's announcement last Sunday about the plans for coming out of lockdown, it is clear that life will be much the same for many of for some time to come yet. The changes that the Prime Minister, and the government have planned will be very gradual changes. There will be tiny steps, with slight easing of restrictions. Checking and testing against their criteria will take place at every step of the way.

This is not for those of us who are shielding and self-isolating due to vulnerability. We must keep going as we are. The Holy Spirit is here to comfort us. He will help us to be patient, and to accept our isolation. He will guide us in our thinking, as we plan for how we will worship together again when churches are allowed to reopen. He will guide and comfort us as we deal with the financial situation of the parish. The Holy spirit is always with us.

Do not let your hearts be troubled.

Rest in our Lord Jesus Christ, who loves and cares for you.

And rest in the Holy Spirit, who will comfort you, and intercede for you.

Allow god's love to flow through you to others.