

**Homily for 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, Year A**  
**By Fr. Jerome Ituah, OCD**  
**Readings: Acts 8:5-8,14-17; Ps 65(66); 1 Pet 3:15-18; Jn 14:15-21**  
**Theme: I will not leave you Orphans!**

As Jesus was coming to the end of his mission, he had the last supper with his disciples, where he washed their feet. Then, he told them he would soon leave them. However, he assured them of his continued presence and told them he would not leave them as orphans. Instead, he would send them another Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, who will be with them forever.

The word, *yathom*, used in the Hebrew Bible, refers to the fatherless child, an orphan. And this word is translated in Greek as *orphanos*, which has an extended meaning of one deprived of parents, abandoned, helpless or unprotected. Therefore, the Greek understanding of *orphanos* means that even a child with parents suffering deprivation, abandoned or unprotected qualified as an orphan. The Hebrew Bible always puts the orphan side by side with the widow. And the Law is emphatic that the widows and orphans must never be mistreated (cf. Exo 22:22; Deut 24:17; Isa 1:17) because God will execute justice on their behalf (cf. Deut 10:18). The people must always provide for the orphans and widows (cf. Deut 14:29). Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the orphans (cf. Deut 27:19). God is the Father of the fatherless (cf. Ps 68:5) and upholds them (cf. Ps 146:9).

When Jesus says to the disciples that he would not leave them orphans, here are the implications. One, Jesus had been with them as a protector and support and acted as their Lord and master. Now he is about to leave them. He would not leave them fatherless. He will provide another Father figure for them, the Holy Spirit. Two, he is their God, the Father of the fatherless. Jesus takes the place of the God of the Old Testament, who protected the rights of the orphans. Although the disciples will become vulnerable in the world, the Holy Spirit will continue the same role Jesus played, though no longer physically, as Jesus was among his disciples. Three, as God provided for the orphans, and Jesus had provided for the disciples; the Holy Spirit will continue to supply their needs and provide security and sustenance for them as they do the work of God. Four, the Father of the orphan will protect the rights of the disciples, and anyone who perverts justice against them will be answerable to God. Therefore, the disciples have nothing to fear. The Holy Spirit will be their Advocate, who will plead, defend and protect their interest. Therefore, Jesus will continue to be with the disciples through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

The apostles and disciples received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost in fulfilment of the words of Jesus. The Holy Spirit gave them the boldness to preach the gospel and the courage to withstand persecution and challenges. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples, too, became parents and protectors of those who joined the Christian faith, encouraging them in times of persecution and hardships just as Jesus was to them. As Peter tells us in the second reading, God does not abandon us even in suffering.

Our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles is the aftermath of the persecution in Jerusalem that disperse many disciples into Gentile territories, that is, non-Jewish areas. Philip went to Samaria and continued preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. The people welcomed his message listening to his preaching and observing his miracles. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans had accepted the faith, they sent Peter and John to them. The apostles would not leave the new Christians as orphans nor abandon them; they must support them as fathers of the faith. They prayed for the Samaritans also to receive the Holy Spirit. The reception of the Holy Spirit empowers them to give birth and parent others into the Christian faith. Although the Samaritans had been baptised in the name of Jesus, they had not received the Holy Spirit until the apostles laid hands on them. That is what we call the sacrament of Confirmation today.

As Christians, we are born into the life of Christ to give birth to others. We become godparents to others in the faith. We support them as parents and never abandon them. How many godchildren do you have? Are you in touch with them? I hope you don't leave them as orphans.