

Although there have been times in my life when I've never had a clear picture of the Spirit's place in my life – I have to admit that the older I get, the more I recognize the working of the Spirit in my life. I'm not a very patient person (and I can picture my family and friends, and probably a lot of you vigorously shaking your heads on that admission) but now when I am in a situation where I need patience ----- and suddenly feel a calm and peace come over me – I think to myself – “hmm, a sudden patience – that's the work of the Holy Spirit.”

In today's Gospel of John, Jesus promises: “I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you.” The Holy Spirit is the way in which Jesus carries out this promise.

Jesus' life on earth was about more than just three years of public ministry. Jesus tells us the Advocate, or in Greek: the Paraclete --- will be with us --- and that Spirit will call us together and motivate us to do incredible things --- as well as very ordinary things with extraordinary love.

So Jesus promises us – and throughout our readings from the Acts of the Apostles this Easter season – we have heard about the support, the love, the encouragement and the motivation the Spirit will give to us as a followers of Jesus – just as the Spirit gave those things to the early Church.

But what was that line in the Gospel?

Oh yes, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” We don't always want to obey or even listen to what Jesus has to say to us – we want to be independent and do it our own way. So we end up listening to what the world around us is telling us – and ignore the teachings of Jesus.

And the result is that we are unhappy and feel empty. We feel like orphans – because we have orphaned ourselves --- separating ourselves from a loving God who waits for us to turn back to his open arms.

Pope Francis describes this behavior so well when he says: “The Spirit blows where it wills – but one of the most common temptations of those who have faith --- is to try to redirect the Spirit – to drive it off in another direction.”

Jesus is not asking us to EARN his love – that's a gift – we are already loved deeply and endlessly. But God's plan for each of us is to realize how loved we are and to be so filled with gratitude -- that we want to follow Jesus with all our hearts, minds, and souls – and do the things Jesus did –

THIS is so not the way of the world – it's counter-cultural and not always understood by those around us --- but Jesus asks us to follow him and to die to ourselves.

That dying to ourselves, which sounds so dramatic – can be carried out quietly every day in our lives --- when we put the needs of others ahead of our own ---

--when we refrain from an angry outburst – no matter how justified in our minds –

--when we reach out to those in need or become more merciful to those around us whose desperate lives so urgently need our awareness and mercy.

The more we make our hearts like the heart of Jesus, the easier it is to find Jesus in our lives – and the Holy Spirit is simply Jesus' presence in our lives.

Again, Pope Francis says that “the Holy Spirit, as Jesus said, will teach us everything and is the living presence of God in the Church.”

It is when we call out to the Holy Spirit with our groans and cries and deepest longings --- that we will realize we have had that support, love, encouragement, and motivation in our hearts all along.

Because God sends the Spirit to befriend us. The Spirit that enlivens, sanctifies, enlightens, and sets us free—which then makes the darkened roads in our lives, clearer – and heavy burdens, lighter.