

[Readings: Acts 8:5-8, 14-17; Psalm 66; 1 Peter 3:15-18; John 14:15-21]

You and I are now at the same place where Jesus and His Apostles are in today's Gospel. Between Jesus' departure from this earth and His return in glory at the Second Coming. Jesus chooses His words and advice carefully. What's the first thing He says in today's excerpt from His farewell speech? "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."

Some people use those words to manipulate us. "If you really loved me, you would buy this very expensive item that I don't need." "If you loved me, you would let me go out with my friends and do something bad that I shouldn't be doing." "If you loved me, you would be able to read my mind and know what I am thinking."

Some of us think that Commandments, rules or regulations stifle, restrict and confine us. In fact, they help us to learn the truth, to be set free, and to grow in our faith formation.

What were HIS commandments? Love God. Love others. Love yourself. So simple to say. Love Language is so difficult to live out. I recently read what Love Language really means. And on this Mother's Day, we thank those women who have shown us Love Language. There are five qualities of Love Language.

Quality Time: As worn out as these words have become, spending time with each other is one of the most precious gifts we can give each other.

Words of Affirmation: For every complaint we give each other, we need to give a compliment. This helps build self-esteem in spouses and in children.

Acts of Service: We live outside our personal, self-centered needs by tending to the needs of others. We learn to become members of the world-wide human family.

Physical Touch: An unexpected hand on the shoulder, a loving nudge, even a glance of affection go a long way. Hugs, too, when they are appropriate.

Gift Giving: We cultivate an "attitude of gratitude" by sharing what we have.

Jesus showed these five qualities while He was on earth. Three years of quality time spent with His Apostles. Affirming them in their spiritual progress and correcting them when they didn't. Coming to serve and not to be served. Giving His healing touch to those who in need. Giving the gift of the Holy Spirit after He left His earthly life.

Jesus calls them His “friends.” True friendship satisfies our human heart. True friends help us to make the right choices. True friends help us get through life’s difficulties. We give the best of what we have to each other, and on those bad days, we give the worst. We learn to say, ‘I’m sorry,’ and ‘I forgive you.’” The Church is the same way. Why aren’t we getting it?

We lament about how so many people are choosing the Culture of Death over the Culture of Life. They are abandoning their faith and leaving the Church. They still don’t get the message that Jesus preached and gave us to share with the world.

You and I are not selling the product convincingly enough to attract people to the Gospel, to the Church, to St. Martin’s. Why is this? Do we believe what we profess? And do we put it into action so powerfully that others see our faith and want to imitate it?

I have found over the years that the Number One Reason why people join any parish is simple. They say, “I want what you have.” They have seen our relationship with Jesus Christ, our Catholic faith in action, and they want to share in that themselves.

Do we need a helper, an advocate, like those Apostles upon whom the Holy Spirit has not yet descended? Alisa Hope Wagner once said, “The Holy Spirit is like the wind. It can be gentle enough to stroke a leaf but hard enough to bend a tree.”

How is the Holy Spirit working in your lives right now? Is it a gentle breeze or a powerful force? Is it both? The Apostles and the disciples are fruitful in their ministry because they have someone alongside of them, in addition to the Holy Spirit. They have each other. We have each other here at St. Martin de Porres Parish.

As your pastor I can tell you that although our number of active parishioners has suffered since the COVID-19 Pandemic, I have seen great spiritual progress in so many of you. We are becoming that “leaner, meaner church” that Pope Benedict XVI once spoke about. “Leaner” meaning fewer in numbers. “Meaner” not in the sense of being mean, but “meaner” in the sense of becoming spiritually stronger, more fit. We are called to focus on quality, not quantity!

Now we need to figure out how to become an evangelical Church, as Pope Francis is challenging us to be.

How to be Intentional, Joyful, Missionary Disciples. You haven’t heard THAT in my homily for a long time! But that’s our job title and our mission, given by Jesus

Himself: you and I are called to be Intentional – we freely choose to do it and want to do it; Joyful – we have the enduring Joy of the Lord in our hearts; Missionary – we are called to get out of bed, get off the couch, get off the pews and work; we are called to be Disciples – students, learners, realizing that we still have so much to learn and to do. This is because of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.

At the time of Jesus, a “paraclete” was a legal assistant, a courtroom advocate. Jesus is telling us that the Holy Spirit is OUR legal assistant Who speaks up for us when we are falsely accused, judged or wrongly condemned.

Jesus calls that Spirit, the Paraclete, the “Spirit of Truth.” God always knows the truth about us, despite what people think of us and the wrong things people say about us. Jesus promises to be with us. He says, “I will not abandon you. I will not leave you orphaned. I am with you.” We have that “Advocate,” that “Paraclete,” that legal assistant Whom we can call to be alongside us. I think of my dear Mom, God rest her soul, and the many ways she was an advocate for us four kids over the years.

St. Peter gives us a word of encouragement in today's Second Reading: “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.” Be ready and be prepared to defend your Catholic faith. I think that's what makes us different from this world. We have Light and Truth and Hope. The world has only darkness and lies and despair.

The choice seems so easy, doesn't it? But the Evil One makes sin so beautiful, so attractive, so seductive. He makes the darkness appear as light. He makes his lies appear to be the truth. He takes away our hope and leaves us in despair. He has been busy more and more with each generation.

When we debate with those who challenge our beliefs, St. Peter says to “do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear.” We don't resort to personal attacks. We don't shout or call names or use labels. We debate the issue objectively. We discuss the issue with charity.

Don't ever be ashamed of defending the truth.

The Letter of Peter says, "It is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil." Where in your life have you had to change your behavior,

make a difficult choice, or renounce something you desired because of your faith in God? To what good did these sacrifices lead?

The world may have some pretty convincing attorneys and legal advocates on its side. But we have God on our side. We are baptized and most of us are confirmed and strengthened by the Eucharist. We don't have to wait any longer nor do we need to be afraid. Case closed. Court dismissed. AMEN! ALLELUIA!