



# Bringing Home the Word

Sixth Sunday of Easter (A)

May 17, 2020

## Shepherd, Advocate, Savior

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Jesus promised he wouldn't leave us orphans. As a good shepherd, he was concerned that he would eventually have to leave his sheep. How would he care for them while he was away preparing a place for them? He promises to pray to the Father for an advocate who would be with us always. We are entrusted to an advocate who cares for us until Christ returns.

That advocate is Jesus' very Spirit, the Advocate, the Spirit of truth. The apostles understood this. That's why their first order of business after baptizing a new

believer was to place hands on him or her and pray for the Holy Spirit to come down and confirm the new believer with his gifts. They knew this was essential since it was Jesus' way of staying close to his believers.

This Spirit, which we received at baptism and whose gifts we more actively embraced at confirmation, is a friendship we absolutely need to cultivate. Its inspirations are constantly present, and listening to them is key to maturing as disciples. Who wouldn't want to have direct access to the heart and power of Jesus? Who wouldn't want to have the zeal of the first apostles? Who wouldn't want to have the same spiritual gifts: wisdom, understanding, counsel, courage, knowledge, piety, and awe?

We can. We do. We have the Holy Spirit! If you don't notice his action in your soul the way you'd like to, simply ask the Spirit to help you hear and respond better. Then just stand back and watch him work. +

***This Spirit, which we received at baptism, is a friendship we absolutely need to cultivate.***

## Sunday Readings

**Acts 8:5-8, 14-17**

Unclean spirits, crying out in a loud voice, came out of many possessed people.

**1 Peter 3:15-18**

Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.

**John 14:15-21**

[Jesus said,] "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth...You know it, because it remains with you."

## A Word from Pope Francis

There are so many people waiting for us to go out and meet them and look at them with the tenderness that we have experienced and received from our relationship with God. That is where our power lies: not in our ideals and in our personal projects, but rather in the strength of his mercy.

—Address to the order of

Augustinian recollects, October 20, 2016



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What increases my awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence in me?
- Which one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit do I most need?

# Beyond Suicide: Yes, Trust God

By Pegge Bernecker

Weeks after my only child died unexpectedly, the victim of teenage suicide, I sent an email to a friend: "I'm eating chocolate for Lent. That's a first for me. But I decided that I'm suffering enough and don't need to give anything up. I think my son's un-lived life is enough."

Justin died on a Tuesday, probably around noon. No one knows the time for certain—he had stayed home from school, sick with the flu—or so we thought.

Monday night, before going to an evening class, I opened mail while standing at my kitchen island. A few feet away, Justin sipped chicken soup. An unexpected package contained an advance copy of *Chicken Soup for the Christian Soul II*, which included "One Mother's Dream," my story about becoming a foster adoptive mother—Justin's mother.

I spontaneously asked Justin if he wanted me to read the story to him. He nodded yes and gave me a big smile. Reading the few pages took awhile, but his sixteen-year-old blue eyes grew brighter as I spoke our story: my dream of being a mother, his dream of a forever family. A palpable love flowed between us. I didn't know this would be the last conversation I would have with my son.



Had I had any inkling of the depth of his medical condition, I never would have left him home alone the next morning. But I didn't know. He simply said he still didn't feel well and wanted to sleep. I decided to make my weekly office trip to Denver, an hour away. When I called home that afternoon, the phone rang

and rang. Unable to shake the feeling that something was wrong, I called my husband, insisting he drive home to check on Justin.

## Take Up Your Cross

Half an hour later, as I walked through downtown Denver, my phone rang. Answering quickly, I listened to my husband carefully speak five words: "Justin has taken his life."

I stumbled toward the sidewalk moaning, "No, no, no." I needed to stop time. Questions erupted inside: Why? How? What if? If only? Suddenly I stopped. A deep part of me began to ask, *What am I going to do with this?*

I didn't want this, but from a faraway place, I knew I had a choice to make. Shock flooded my veins, numbing me to full comprehension of the unfolding nightmare. My life had previously borne witness to God's transformative grace in difficult circumstances, and this would be no exception.

## My Journey as a Survivor Taught Me...

- Suicide is first a medical issue—not a moral issue.
- No mentally healthy person jokes about suicide. Get professional help!
- Suicide can carry a burden of shame and a social stigma.
- A crisis of faith in God can erupt. God doesn't interrupt our free will, cause deliberate suffering, or punish us.
- God forgives. Therefore, our question becomes, "Can we forgive?"
- Choose a joyful, expansive memory of the person who has died by suicide. Allow this image to override what you may have seen, imagined, or heard described.
- Go online to research suicide facts, resources, and prevention tips. Share what you learn with others.

Since Justin's death, suicide has impacted five close friends. Whether days or decades since a suicide death, stories detail unresolved grief, regret, shame, guilt, confusion, blame, anger, denial, and eventual healing. My advice is simple: be present to one another, offer compassion, listen, and just show up. Friendship will then become a healing balm. +



*Risen Lord, you remain with us and command us to love one another. Help me to show your love to all people.*

—From *Hopeful Meditations for Every Day of Easter Through Pentecost*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

May 18–23

**Monday**, Easter Weekday:

Acts 16:11–15 / Jn 15:26–16:4a

**Tuesday**, Easter Weekday:

Acts 16:22–34 / Jn 16:5–11

**Wednesday**, Easter Weekday:

Acts 17:15, 22–18:1 / Jn 16:12–15

**Thursday**, Easter Weekday:

Acts 18:1–8 / Jn 16:16–20

**Friday**, Easter Weekday:

Acts 18:9–18 / Jn 16:20–23

**Saturday**, Easter Weekday:

Acts 18:23–28 / Jn 16:23b–28

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