

Earlier this year, I was able to watch the Broadway Musical “Dear Evan Hansen.” I don’t want to give away too much of the story, but the show is largely about a boy named Evan Hansen who was fighting loneliness in his life. In the headline song, “You will be found”, Evan Hansen sings, “Have you ever felt like nobody was there? Have you ever felt forgotten in the middle of nowhere? Have you ever felt like you could disappear? Like you could fall, and no one would hear?” This song is so poignant because loneliness is something we have all faced in our lives at one time or another, perhaps especially now in these days of COVID-19 as we are forced to socially isolate ourselves from one another.

Luckily for us, today’s Gospel offers a cure for loneliness. There, we encounter Jesus offering His final words to His Apostles during the Last Supper before He was taken away from them. He told them that even though He would soon be gone, they would not be left alone. “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth... you know him because he remains with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans.” No matter how bad things might get for them in the future, they would never be orphans because the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, would be with them always.

What does this actually mean, however? What does it mean that we will have the Advocate with us. On the one hand, the term “advocate” can be used for someone who judges and prosecutes. And while we cannot discount the fact that there will come a day when God will judge us and separates us one from the other, the saved from the damned, at the same time we must keep in mind the fact that “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through him.”

There is luckily for us another meaning to the word “advocate” as well, referring to someone who encourages us and appeals for us on our behalf. In this

sense, the Spirit is not seeking to condemn us but to save us, advocating on our behalf that we might be shown mercy. We hear this meaning in John's First Epistle when he says, "My children, I am writing this to you so that you may not commit sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. He is expiation for our sins, and not only for our sins but for those of the whole world."

In other words, at the Last Supper Jesus was not threatening His Apostles, telling them that they had better behave when He was gone because they had a judge ready to punish them as soon as they stepped out of line. Instead, He was seeking to comfort them, saying that they did not need to fear during His absence because His Spirit would always be with them, guiding them and interceding for them with the Father. Think back to today's first reading. The presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives was so important that when the Apostles heard that some of the new Gentile converts had not yet received the Holy Spirit, they went immediately and laid hands on them so that the Spirit might descend upon them as well.

It is not unusual for us to hear that we must have a relationship with Jesus Christ. How many of us, however, have ever heard about the fact that we must also have a relationship with the Holy Spirit? Even after encountering the risen Lord, the first disciples all knew that every Christian needed a relationship with the Holy Spirit... that every Christian needs the power of the Advocate in our lives.

If this is the case, then how do we invite the power of the Spirit into our lives? On one level, it means that each of us are invited to seek charismatic gifts in our lives. Now, when I say this, some of you might immediately think of charismatic gifts like speaking in tongues and prophecy. While these are true gifts which we can seek, they are only the most superficial gifts granted by the Holy Spirit. Think back to Paul's teaching to the Corinthians. "If I speak in human and angelic tongues but

do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge... but do not have love, I am nothing.”

At its deepest level, having a relationship with the Holy Spirit means that we are immersed in a life of love. As Jesus said in today’s Gospel, “Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.” More than ever, we must learn to call upon the Holy Spirit in our lives so that we might better follow God’s commandments and live powerfully in love.

In order to do this, we must call down the Holy Spirit into every single aspect of our lives. When we become afraid, we must pray, “Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.” When we become tempted, we must pray “Come Holy Spirit...” Again, when we feel alone, we must pray “Come Holy Spirit...” At all times and in all things, we must begin to call upon the Holy Spirit so that our Advocate can come into our hearts and kindle into us the fire of His love.

In the musical which I mentioned, Evan goes on to sing, “Let that lonely feeling wash away, maybe there’s a reason to believe you’ll be okay. ‘Cause when you don’t feel strong enough to stand you can reach, reach out your hand and oh, someone will come running and... take you home. Even when the darkness comes crashin’ through; when you need a friend to carry you, when you’re broken on the ground you will be found!” Just as Evan learned to overcome loneliness by reaching out to those around him, we too must learn to overcome the loneliness and darkness in our own lives by reaching out to the Holy Spirit so that we too might one day be found and carried home.