

## Not alone

29 5 11

God our redeemer,  
you have delivered us from the power of darkness  
and brought us into the kingdom of your Son:  
grant that as by his death he has recalled us to life,  
so by his continual presence in us he may raise us to eternal joy.

My text may be found in today's gospel from John chapter 14 and is verse 18:  
'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you'.

One of the great sadnesses of life is to be an orphan, to have lost both our parents. I appreciate that 21<sup>st</sup> century society in the West offers different models of what constitutes a family but for children to be brought up in a home, loved by a mother and father both of whom care for them, is a model Jesus would have recognised from his own experience of family life with Mary and Joseph. To lose both parents leaves us alone in the world because the two human beings whose love for each other made us, whose genes we inherit, are no longer there for us.

So when this morning in our passage from John's gospel in which Jesus, reflecting on the imminence of the crucifixion which will rudely snatch him away from his friends and disciples, speaks to them reassuringly of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the fact that they will not be abandoned like orphans, that he will not leave them alone, that he will come again to them.

So in a very real sense Christians would claim that we are not alone, that we have not been abandoned, left to our own vices and devices, that the God we worship is in fact as well as in name 'Emmanuel - God with us'.

Of course, what we believe makes little sense to the atheists. I once heard Richard Dawkins on Radio 4 rubbish one of our bishops on the grounds the bishop had an 'imaginary friend'. Why does an intelligent man like Dawkins fail to see what is apparent Christians: that through the presence of the Holy Spirit in us, Jesus is a fact of our lives? Here today's gospel in talking of the Holy Spirit offers a possible answer: 'This is the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees nor knows him.' That atheists cannot see God suggests that they are blind to what we see it because their eyes are closed. I would extend John's image by suggesting it is not only their eyes but also their ears which are closed because atheists are deaf to what God is saying to them, their ears are not only shut but 'double-padded' against the truth breaking in. An atheist is essentially someone for whom the truth, as we see it, is nonsense: at worst delusional; at best wishful-thinking.

But setting this major difference between atheists and believers aside, let us reflect a moment on the mystery of our relationship with the God we worship. Firstly, there is the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives. He is called 'the Advocate'; someone to plead our case for us, someone who is on our side. He is called 'the Spirit of truth' because he will be our guide and companion in our search for the Truth, for what is true. We will know him because he will be part and parcel of what it means to be a complete person, to be a balanced

individual, to be truly ourselves. And here we have an interesting insight into the mystery of the Trinity. We have just been promised the presence of the Holy Spirit but in the very next verse, according to our text, Jesus is promising that he himself is coming to us. Truth is Jesus is present in the Holy Spirit which is paralleled by what he implies about himself and God our Father when he goes on to say, 'I am in my Father'. It is cumulative expression of the mystery which we believe that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and each is in the other – individual but undivided expressions of one God in three persons – the blessed Trinity. But most wonderful of all is the promise that as Christians we are in Christ and he is in us. It is extraordinary that we who are creatures of flesh and of blood should be a place where the Spirit of God can be embodied.

And so we are not alone. God is with us. We are not orphans because God is our father. We have family because we are brothers in Christ and with Christ. We are not alone because the Holy Spirit is present here with us, an essential part of our lives. Of course, to an atheist this is all nonsense but then would you ask a deaf man to comment on the music you can hear or ask a blind man to explain what you can see? We are not alone – He is with us.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist  
St Bartholomew's, Dinard  
29<sup>th</sup> May 2011*

