

## Love, Peace and Belief



*Christ's Final Address to the Apostles | Bona Duccio di Buoninsegna, 1380 | from the Maesta Altar | Siena, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo*

### The Farewell Discourse

Our passage today is taken from the “Farewell Discourse” of Jesus contained in five chapters of John (13:1-17:56). In other words, we have but a few verses which are an integral part of a much larger passage. Our gospel reading for this 6th Sunday of Easter is as though being dropped into the middle of an ongoing conversation. It would be good to “catch up.”

The Discourse has three main parts that are fairly clear:

- The first part (13:31-14:31) focuses on Jesus’ departure and discusses the disciples’ relation to Jesus and their conflict with the world.
- The second part (15:1-16:33) develops these same themes, moving from the relationship of Jesus to the disciples, using the figure of the vine and the branches (15:1-17), to the conflict between the disciples and the world (15:18-16:15), and on to a promise to the disciples of joy in the future after the sorrow of this time of separation (16:16-33).
- In the third major part Jesus prays to his Father (17:1-26).

Throughout, the overall theme is the Father’s presence with the disciples with the Son’s and Spirit’s roles in mediating his presence. Given our gospel resides in the “first part,” let’s first consider a wider view of the text leading up to our passage.

### Part One: Jesus’ departure and return (13:31–14:31)

Once Judas has left the light (13:1), Jesus begins to speak to his own, his dearest friends. Various disciples — Peter, Thomas, Philip, Judas (not Iscariot, possibly Thaddeus) — carry the discussion

forward by the questions they pose. This enables us to break down the whole, hopefully to see it more clearly, by dividing it according to the characters who ask the leading questions.

- The first section (13:31–35) is simply an introduction. Judas' departure has set in motion the events of the passion. Jesus will be glorified, God will be glorified, since God's presence as infinite love is about to be fully manifested in Jesus. Jesus will leave, and that absence (or is it presence?) is the problem underlying this whole section. As he leaves, he leaves behind his one essential commandment: "Love one another" (v. 34). It is a *new* commandment because this mutual love must be modeled on something new — on the love that Jesus shows for his disciples. Mutual love must be the sign, the indispensable sign, of their discipleship.
- Peter (13:36–14:4) moves the discussion further: "*Master, where are you going?*" (13:36). This appearance of Peter permits the evangelist to present a bit of tradition shared, seemingly, by the whole church, that Jesus predicted Peter's denial (13:37–38). Yet, though Peter would deny his Lord, he would also follow him in death (v. 36).

In the subsequent verses (14:1–4), the basic problems that control the rest of the chapter are touched upon. The disciples are troubled (v. 1, as also v. 27) because of Jesus' departure. In response, Jesus insists on the necessity of faith, stating that he goes to prepare a place for them and will return to take them with him (v. 3). This sounds very much like a promise of Jesus' future return as visible Lord of the world (the technical term for this is the *parousia* = coming). The early church awaited this with fervent hope (1 Thess 4:16–18). But John's Gospel reinterprets this future time understanding. In his death and Resurrection, Jesus will not cross over a bridge that was subsequently blown up; there is a way to him, and they already know it (v. 4).

- So Thomas (14:5–7) asks, "*How can we know the way?*" Jesus' answer states that Christian hope is not in a method, not in a procedure, but in a person. Jesus himself is "the way and the truth and the life" (v. 6). Through and in Jesus, one *comes* to the Father, *knows* the Father, *sees* the Father.
- Philip (14:8–21) seizes on that final phrase to ask: "*Master, show us the Father ....*" (v. 8). One can easily imagine a sigh of weariness in Jesus' voice: "*Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*" (v. 9). And the discussion continues, pointing to the perfect union of Jesus with the Father: both his words and his works are the Father's (vv. 10–11). With this, Jesus turns his attention to the disciples. They, too, will do the works that Jesus has done because He will respond according to their petitions, so that God will be manifested in the Son. The disciples' love will bring from the Father another Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, to remain with them always (v. 16). In this sense, Jesus will come back; they will not be left orphans (v. 18).

What is going on? What seemed to be a statement of Jesus' future return to take his disciples to places prepared for them (14:3), a movement carrying believers into some future and unknown paradise, has subtly turned around. The focus has moved from "out there" to discovery within the believers themselves (vv.20-21) connected with another Paraclete who takes Jesus' place as both advocate and revealer (in 1 John 2:1 Jesus is called the first Paraclete).

It is this movement — Jesus' departure and consequent return through the Paraclete — explains the "little while" in v.19: "*In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live*" Just as the disciples see Jesus now, so they will soon know of his union with the Father, which union He will share with them.

*“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.”* (John 4:21) All they could have hoped for in the future will soon be now.

- This provokes the *Judas* (not Iscariot) sequence (14:22–31). Judas and the others were likely expecting a visible return in majesty accompanied by a fearsome display of celestial fireworks. But Jesus is clearly implying something less visibly dramatic and so the question: *“Master, [then] what happened that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?”* (v. 22). Jesus’ answer almost avoids the question simply insisting on what has already been proclaimed. He and the Father will come to those who love and will dwell with them (vv. 23–24).

A clear message is that the fear and distress of people expecting a delayed future return need to understand there is peace and joy to be found in knowing that Jesus has returned to the Father and the Paraclete will accompany them on the way.

And has been the conversation into which our gospel drops us.

### The Way Ahead

<sup>23</sup> *Jesus answered and said to him, “Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. <sup>24</sup> Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me. <sup>25</sup> “I have told you this while I am with you. <sup>26</sup> The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that (I) told you.*

<sup>27</sup> *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. <sup>28</sup> You heard me tell you, ‘I am going away and I will come back to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. <sup>29</sup> And now I have told you this before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe. (John 14:23-29)*

Verse 23 begins with, *“Jesus answered and said to him.”* Jesus is answering the question raised in v. 22 by Judas (not Iscariot): *“Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?”* This question comes because Jesus has just said that he would love and reveal himself to those who have and keep his commandments -- those who love him (v. 21: *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.”*).

The gospel offers a set of contrasts as lenses to understand the meaning and the question in v.22 - how?:

- those who love Jesus and keep his/Father’s word - and those who don’t; and
- those for whom the Spirit indwells thus they know peace - and those apart.

How? (1) through the Word and (2) through the Paraclete.

### Keeping the Word

*“Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me”* (vv. 23-24)

What does it mean to “keep” (*tereo*) Jesus’ word? The basic meanings of this word in TDNT are:

1. keep watch over, guard
2. keep, hold, reserve, preserve someone or something
3. keep = not lose

4. keep = protect
5. keep, observe, fulfill, pay attention to

*NOTE: that “obey” is not one of the meanings (although perhaps implied by “observe”).*

Brian Stofferregen’s paraphrase of *tereo* as “hold dear” or perhaps, “consider important” seems to capture the sense of the passage. This interpretation goes beyond mere obedience. One may detest the words that one is hearing and obeying. One may detest the one giving the orders, but to avoid punishment, one obeys them. In contrast to this, phrasing it, “Holding Jesus’ word dear,” implies having a positive attitude towards that Word and the Word-giver. That is, *wanting* to hear and obey it out of love for the speaker.

Loving Jesus and “holding dear” what Jesus said and did are inseparable. In chapters 14-15, twice “love” comes before “keep” (14:15; 23) and twice “keep” comes before “love” (14:21; 15:10). In addition, “keeping” is used with “commandments” (*entole*) (14:15, 21; 15:10) and with “word” (*logos*) (14:23, 24; 15:20). Loving Jesus and “holding dear” his word and commandments are inseparable.

Along this same line, Leon Morris writes: “This means that it is more important to obey them in daily life than to have a firm intellectual grasp of their content. This does not mean that the Father’s love is merited by this obedience: in the first place Jesus is saying that love for him is not only a matter of words; if it is real it is shown by deeds. The lover does what the loved one asks. In the second place he is saying that the Father is not indifferent to the attitude people take toward the Son. This does not mean that God hands out rewards on the basis of merit, but rather that love calls to love. Not only will such people be loved by the Father, but Jesus will love them too.”

The connection between love and keeping (i.e., holding dear) the commandments is illustrated by Jesus himself in v. 31. He is doing what the Father has commanded him, *so that* the world might know that he is loving the Father. The purpose of Jesus’ obedience is witnessing.

The results of loving Jesus and keeping his word in v. 23 are:

1. The Father will love that one
2. The Father and Son will come to that one
3. The Father and Son will make a dwelling with that one

The promise we have from Jesus is that he (and his Father) will be present to those who, out of their love for Jesus, keep (i.e., hold dear) his word. These are those to whom Jesus will reveal himself.

In contrast to those who love Jesus and keep his word, Jesus next talks about “*Whoever does not love me does not keep (hold dear) my words*” (v. 24). Presumably these non-lovers and non-keepers do not receive the Father’s love or the abiding presence of the Father and the Son. This is understandable if the love and presence comes through the Word that one “holds dear” or “considers valuable,” those who do not have this relationship with the Word will not have the presence of the divine in their lives.

The subject changes in the next phrase: “...yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me” (v.24)

Keeping the “words” in the v.23 is now phrased “hearing the word.” This phrase elucidates the “us/our” in v. 23 – the Word that brings the presence comes from both Father and Son. The three cannot be separated: Word, Father, and Son.

### **The Promise of the Advocate**

*The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name* (v.26). In some translation you might read “the Paraclete.” In either case, there is an argument that perhaps it best not to translate the

Greek word *paraclete* because there are too many possibilities. While the literal meaning of the related verb (*parakaleo*) means “to call to one’s side,” usually asking the other for help, the noun took on a legal meaning as “helper in court”. Thus we have translations like “counselor,” “advocate,” or “one who speaks for another” as well as the too general translation of “helper”.

This word occurs five times in the NT. It is used in 1 John 2:1 to refer to Jesus; and four times in John’s Farewell Discourse (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

If the Advocate is a “helper in court,” whose helper is it? Clearly the Advocate has a role as helper to the disciples (and, now, our helper); but there are also indications that it is Jesus’ helper. The Advocate comes to speak to us for Jesus. In 14:26, it will teach us everything and remind us of all that Jesus has said to us. In 15:26, it will testify on Jesus’ behalf.

In our text, the Advocate will teach us “everything” and remind us of “all” that Jesus has said to us. (In 16:8; its topics are more specific: the truth about sin, righteousness, and judgment.) It is not too much of a stretch to say that the Advocate “helps” us to hear Jesus’ word, which, as noted above, brings the continuing presence of Jesus and his Father to us. The Paraclete reveals Jesus to us, but those without the help of the Paraclete will not properly hear or remember the word of Jesus’ presence.

## Peace

*<sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid*

Peace was commonly used at this time as a word of greeting (20:19, 21, 26) or of farewell. And so it would seem to fit well here in the Farewell Discourse. But the expression used here is not the usual formula of farewell.

Leon Morris offers: “Having stated positively what he gives, Jesus goes on to differentiate this gift from anything that the world can give. When the world uses “Peace” in a greeting it expresses a hope. It can do no more. And even that it usually does in no more than a conventional sense like our “Good-bye” (= “God be with you”). But Christ gives people peace. Moreover, the peace of which he speaks is not dependent on outward circumstances, as any peace the world can give must necessarily be. Because he gives people such a peace Jesus can enjoin them not to be troubled in heart nor cowardly. Christ-given serenity excludes both. In the Bible “peace” is given a wider and deeper meaning than in other Greek writings. For the Greeks (as for us) peace was essentially negative, the absence of war. But for the Hebrews it meant positive blessing, especially a right relationship with God. This is to be seen in the Old Testament, and it is carried over into the New. The word here has its fullest content.”

The fullest content of “peace” is connected to the reign of God. In a quote from *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, edited by Darrell L. Gruder we see the larger connection:

A definitive answer to the question, What is the reign of God? cannot be given. But we can at least sketch some of its contours by listening to the Old Testament’s prophetic forecasts of the coming day of God and the prophets’ expectations of God’s intended future for the world. In lectures given in the early 1980s, philosopher Arthur Holmes summarized that prophetic vision as *shalom*. It envisions a world characterized by peace, justice, and celebration. *Shalom*, the overarching vision of the future, means “peace,” but not merely peace as the cessation of hostilities. Instead, *shalom* envisions the full prosperity of a people of God living under the covenant of God’s demanding care and compassion. In the prophetic vision, peace such as this comes hand in hand with justice. Without justice, there can be no real peace, and without peace, no real justice. Indeed, only

in a social world full of peace grounded in justice can there come the full expression of joy and celebration. [pp. 90-91]

What would be troubling our hearts? There is something puzzling in Jesus' words: "*Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. I am going away and I will come back to you.*" Going away and coming back? What kind of sense does that make?

- (1) Start with the pre-Jesus world. God the Father had been with the people for all ages. The Old Testament tells about this over and over. Yet, throughout these ages, God the Father remained unknowable in many ways. Moses is not allowed to look directly. God says, "*I will set you in the hollow of the rock and will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand, so that you may see my back* [really it says "so that you may look upon my hindermost quarters"]; *but my face is not to be seen. To see God directly would destroy a human being.*" (Exodus 33:18-23).
- (2) To close this gap, God decided to show us everything about himself in a way we can understand. He spoke out his very self and he used a Word that left nothing unsaid. Humanity is the language he used, and Jesus was the Word spoken in that language. Now God can be known because we can know Jesus. This is a point St. John of the Cross makes clear in his "Ascent to Mt Carmel" when God tells the saint to ask no more questions, but to look to Jesus who is the answer to all the questions.
- (3) Jesus dies, resurrects and ascends to the Father from whom he came. Are we abandoned? No. Just like the Father did, Jesus speaks out his own very self in another Word that leaves nothing of himself unsaid. That Word is the Holy Spirit, the Advocate

This Spirit is the full reality of the divine/human being called Jesus, and is already the very interior Spirit of God. We are to be closer to Jesus and to the Father than the apostles were!

If you and I say yes to this Spirit, we will know Jesus just as sheep know the voice of their shepherd. In knowing Jesus we will know the Father. We will find him in the Mass, in the Great Eucharistic Sacrament, in prayer, in the people around us. We will be side by side with each other, in the closest possible presence of the God of love.

### Why all this?

<sup>29</sup> *And now I have told you this before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe.*

### Notes

**14:25** *teach you everything and remind you of all that (I) told you:* The Holy Spirit recalls what Jesus has said, taking it deeper and farther into the memory and consciousness of the disciples (*cf.* John 2:2, 12:16)

**14:26** *Advocate:* The English word "paraclete" simply transliterates the Greek word that basically means "advocate. This word has legal connotation. Literally it means "one who stands by the side of a defendant." The 1956 *Jerusalem Bible* translates paraclete as "advocate," but the 1985 *Jerusalem Bible* uses "paraclete!" The 1970 *New American Bible* translation used "paraclete" but the 1986 revision replaced it with "advocate!" Other translations prefer the word "counselor" (*New International Version*) or "comforter" (*King James Version*). What does the evangelist himself indicate the meaning might be? The "paraclete" performs at least three functions or activities. (1) It is the continued presence of Jesus on earth after Jesus' departure to heaven (14:12, 16). (2) It is a truth-telling spirit (14:17; 16:13) that testifies on behalf of Jesus and in defense of him. It affirms that Jesus was not a shameful failure but rather the beloved of God, a faithful and dutiful Son. (3) It

reminds them of things that Jesus said (14:26) and reveals things Jesus was unable to convey (16:12-14). On another note, this is the only place in the NT where the expression “Holy Spirit” is found

**14:27 *Peace*:** the traditional Hebrew salutation *shalom* wishing an absence of war, conflict or tension; but Jesus' "Shalom" is a gift of salvation, connoting the bounty of messianic blessing (cf. Isa 9:6-7; 52:7; 57:19; Hag 2:9; Acts 10:36; Rom 14:17)

***let your hearts not be troubled*:** This is an exact repetition of words from Jesus in v.1 and v.27

**14:28 *if you loved me*:** Brown (654) sees this seeming conditional not as an implied “you do not love me” but rather their love – at this moment – is not as it ought to be. Their love is possessive rather than something they freely give.

***the Father is greater than I*:** This passage was one of the central arguments of Arius in claiming a subordination of Jesus to God – others used it to argue against the divinity of Jesus. Cyril of Alexandria, Ambrose and Augustine explained that *as a man* the Incarnate Son was less than the Father. But it must be remembered that John is not constructing a Christology or even a theology. He is likely speaking about “glorification.” Jesus is departing, signifying that his work is nearly complete. Now he will be glorified with the glory that he has with the Father before the world existed. This should be the cause of the disciples’ rejoicing – because then Jesus will glorify his disciples with eternal life (17:2)

## Sources

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