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Well, thanks to our beloved leader-servant, Henri, I received a Peanuts comic clip last week that I think (maybe unknowingly to him) portrays very well today's Gospel. It presents Linus and Snoopy the dog, looking out over the water. It's a time of meditation. Linus says to Snoopy: "We're all going to die one day, Snoopy." And Snoopy answers : "Yes, but all the other days we're going to live!"

The reason I'm using this cartoon as an analogy for today's Gospel is because it's as if Jesus was saying : "Guys, I'm going to leave you all some day, (maybe even sooner than you think)." And the disciples on the other hand are wondering: "But what's going to happen to us, for all those days we still have to live?"

COVID-19 has placed us in a situation of rapid change where some of us have to ask ourselves : "What is life really all about?" Our common vulnerability in respect to our own end of life might bring us to question the kind of legacy we want to leave to those who will follow us. My cousin in Vancouver actually has a web site called Legacy Café, where people talk about what they want to be remembered by. Jesus has the same concern for legacy.

Today's Gospel presents a summary of Jesus' last wishes. And it is quite simple:

I am going now...to prepare you a place (14:2)

I will not leave you orphans (18)

I will ask My Father to send you the Spirit, a Spirit of truth. (17)

This Spirit will abide in you (17)

and you will be able to live in the love of the Father. (21)

With this pandemic (COVID-19) a lot of attention had been placed on the most vulnerable persons, on those who like me are considered old (70) and delicate (if not decrepid). It's given us a lot of time to mull over things. So these last days I've been thinking about the end of my life and have worked on my living will and last testament. Another cousin has asked me to even write my memoirs. In today's Gospel, Jesus too



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is getting ready for the end. He wants to prepare his disciples for the hard times he knows they are soon going to have to face. Without these final explanations of Jesus given to us by John, the disciples (and we the believers who follow them) would have been left quite in the dark about Jesus' full mission.

Just to put John's text in perspective, he has a whopping 7 chapters out of 21 (so a whole third of his Gospel) to present Jesus' last will and testament... to present on his last day here on earth that which Jesus wants us to remember him by.

Normally, when people feel that they are no longer going to be present on this earth, they leave their loved ones with some thing : a memento, a smell, a song, but it's always something other than the actual person; for in dying, each person truly disappears for ever. So too, in this Gospel story, Jesus will die and apparently disappear, but instead of leaving us "bereft" (hanging out dry, like orphans) he will surprisingly and mysteriously replace his own person with another person – the Advocate (his Advocate), the Spirit (his Spirit).

Of course, we have to admit, Jesus is the only one in all of humanity who has ever been able to do this.

Now Jesus invites his disciples to to keep his commandments. These commandments are not a bunch of do's and don't's but an ethos, an environment that exists to promote life. The commandments consist 1) in believing Jesus, and 2) in doing as he has done while on earth: relating to God as Father, healing, offering compassion, promoting the common good, and opening us up to the fact that, irregardless of gender, status, color or origin, we are all children of God. Jesus is one of the first globalists!

For my atheist friends, all this is a bunch of gobbledygook! And if I look at this only with my intellect, my atheist friends certainly have a lot of the marbles on their side.



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And yet ! and yet ! How is it that this same message has been heard and believed by millions and millions of people for some 2,000 years and is still going strong in all parts of the world and in all cultures. Two point three billion Christians (one third of the world's population ... and 4 times more than what it was a hundred years ago) can't all be that wrong! How could this exist, if it were not due to the constant presence of the Spirit of God at work inspiring faith within all of humanity. Yes, the man Jesus is no longer among us. And yet, truly, the Xt-man Jesus is everywhere through his Spirit, who mysteriously prods, and supports, and helps, and saves. I know the Spirit of Jesus exists, because I have seen it and felt it at work. I do really hope that all of us may have experienced this sometimes in our lives... It really puts things in perspective. This Spirit of Jesus is the soul of the assembly of believers gathered in all parts of the earth.

The Spirit is the "Advocate", a Greek word that describes "a being who is on the side of an other", a helper, someone who intercedes for the other. Yet, brother Yves Congar, a renowned Dominican theologian, said at the end of the Second Vatican Council that the Person who appeared to be the Greatest absent One in all of the Council discussions, and yet who had also had the greatest supreme impact on the Council Fathers, was the Spirit of Jesus. Working mysteriously behind the scenes, in silence, the Spirit today is the greatest source of change and strength within the Church. This is the One whom Jesus was offering to his disciples when he left this world. This is the One with whom we are now blessed, and are experiencing in our collective spiritual journey. The Spirit is truly here at our side, abiding fully in us, writes John (17). To know that the Spirit is actually IN us, to me, is extremely comforting and energizing !!!

And John adds that the Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. This Advocate is the one who reveals the truth about our belief in Jesus and the One who gives us the strength to believe in Jesus. Now, during Jesus' trial, Pilate will ask Jesus sarcastically [without offering any response] : "Truth? What is that?" (18:38) For John, truth is very important. John refers to it 21 times in his 21 chapters. This doesn't alter the fact that truth remains enigmatic, puzzling and perplexing at times.



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I do not know if you have seen or visited our Dominican Monastery in Ottawa. Over the front door there is a big “Veritas” [truth in Latin] sign chiselled in stone, as if all those who live in that place or walked under the front portal agreed to be truth-bearers. Is it a statement indicating that Dominicans possess or control the Truth?

I rather like to think of the Dominicans as Truth-seekers and as Truth-questers, not as Truth-hoarders nor as Truth-monopolizers. In the 13th century, Dominicans were known as mendicants. And I believe that they remain mendicants in their ministry, beggars of truth. This is why study and prayer play such an important part of our lives. Study to constantly search out the truth, and prayer to keep us honest about our research through the presence of the Holy Spirit. For John, truth is not necessarily the intellectual grasping of reality as we would define it today, but access to the fulness of God’s Being, obtained through faith, which in turn opens us up to salvation.

If we pursue truth and keep the commandments, Jesus says we will be loved by the Father. Now, “Love”, as the many songs that use this theme today show us, is a very complex reality. There are three words for “love” in Greek. There is “eros” easy-love, i.e. an instinctive interest in things, in pleasure. However, this word does not appear in the New Testament. Then there is friendship (philos) as in the word “philo-sophy” – lover of wisdom. But where John goes all out, is his use of the third meaning -- “agapè-love” which he uses four times in the last two lines of today’s Gospel.

This agapè-love is more than just affection. This is total love, unconditional love, laying-down-your-life-for-another love, ultimate love as God gives it and as God allows we humans to give it to others and back to God. By being in the Spirit – with the Spirit already in us -- we are able to enter the realm of God’s love and life. Without agapè-love for one’s sister or brother, one does not really know God. As Augustine stated: “God became human so that we humans could become divine.”

How utterly awesome is God’s dream for us! We puny little humans are made able to take on the value of divine stardust... I must admit : God is either foolish or knows something about us we do not know or believe enough in!



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The Gospel is not fairy-tale material. It also challenges us: how often have we heard this reading? or other passages of Jesus' legacy? Often, I am sure. Yet we need to ask ourselves: "So what has changed in my understanding or in my behaviour because of it"?

I leave you with the Story of the Mother Foundress of a Sister's community. She's on her last breath. Some young sisters wonder what they can do to ease her final moments. One sister says: "Let's give her some warm milk to sip." On their way to the barn another sister says : "Let's put some brandy in the milk." Which they do. Back at the Foundress's bedside, they dip their pinky finger in the milk they have warmed up and give it to the Foundress, who smacks her lips with delight and asks for more. She then calls out : "Sisters, come ...". And the sisters all gather around the Foundress' bed to hear her last words... and she says : "Sisters... take great care... of that cow!!!"

We too need to continue praying for the warm "spiked" milk of God, the warm Spirit-based milk of God, allowing for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in each us, to inspire us on this, our human journey...

**Michel Côté, O.P.**