

Homily 6th Sunday in Easter – Year A 21st May 2016

As I was ‘Hoovering-up’ ideas for today’s homily trying to find a lead into today’s Gospel I came across a short article by Fr Michael Tate. In his article Fr Michael looks at the Greek word: ‘paraclete’. Now I’m mildly dyslexic, as you may have noticed, and have trouble with some words but words fascinate me. In my dyslexic brain I have always associated the Greek word: ‘paraclete’ with ‘parakeet’ as in a small parrot, a Budgerigar. I am aware that the Greek ‘paraclete’ translates to advocate, being a person who advocates or argues a case on behalf of another. The idea of the Holy Spirit as a Budgerigar is difficult to shift. But Fr Michael offers a different explanation of Paraclete. He focuses on the first part of the word ‘para’ as in the word parallel. Now parallel lines are two straight lines that are drawn side by side but never meet. So in Fr Michael analogy the Holy Spirit is our advocate who travels with us through our lives running parallel with us experiencing what we experience, protecting us, guiding us advocating on our behalf. The Holy Spirit is like our spiritual companion who walks with us.

Why do we need protecting, why do we need an advocate? Why, because like the disciples we have to face life. Like any good parent Jesus knew His children would have to face life. Now as we know, life is life, you can't escape it is not good or bad it's just life. We all journey through life, but that life can take many different paths. The Christian path, the path of Christ is as radical today as it was in the time of the disciples, why because it is focused on love, both a love of God and one another. Love is the message of Christ, a message that focuses on our relationships with God and each other, a message that looks beyond 'self'. Our society however is focused on 'self': After all we are the centre of the universe and the universe is at our disposal. Our self-centeredness is not a new phenomenon; in Greek mythology the God Narcissus was so self-infatuated that on seeing his own reflection in a pool and he fell in love with it, not realizing it was merely an image. Unable to leave the beauty of his reflection, Narcissus lost his will to live. He stared at his reflection until he died. We too can become so self-infatuated with our material and false-selves that we become so encrusted with possessions and our status that there is no room for anyone else in our lives

except ourselves. We become so encrusted that our love of God and the people in our lives suffocates. That true-self the part of me known to God, the part of me that loves begins to wither.

When I was a kid I use to go to work with my Grandfather, George Moore, on his truck. One of the factories we went to had a pickling-tank. Now this was not a tank to make pickles, far from it, a pickling tank is basically an acid bath that is used to clean metal before its coated with chrome or some other finish. I would stand in amazement as a rusty painted object was lowed into the tank to immerge as a gleaming piece of steel. I once asked Joe the guy who operated the tank what would happen if there was no steel just rust. He said with a smile let's put a bit of wood in and see what happens. OHS was not high on the agenda in those days. To my utter amazement the wood completely disappeared. Joe said if there is no metal there is nothing left.

When I was reflecting on today's Gospel I thought of that pickling-tank some 60 years ago and I could not help but think about life. Life is not good or bad but like the pickling-tank tank it strips off all our encrusted

layers and reveal our true-self. You see life deals up tragedies to all of us quite indiscriminately it has no favourites. Contrary to popular belief there is no good and bad luck only life. No matter how we encrust ourselves life will strip every layer away just like the pickle-tank exposing our true-selves. No matter how many houses we might own, no matter what our status is it can all be stripped away. We have all seen it but somehow we all convince ourselves that it only happens to others. Like Narcissus we can become so self-infatuated that we think in the entire universe we are special, we are different, and these things happen to others not us. Something working in hospital ministry does is to destroy that myth completely because I meet so many people who tell me that they never expected this to happen to them.

We will all face unexpected hardships in our lives; it might be the loss of our job or our health or the death of a loved one. At that moment we will find ourselves stripped of all those encrusted layers. The Holy Spirit is not a spiritual body guard who will stop bad things from happening to us. No. The Holy Spirit will help keep us from becoming so encrusted so as to suffocate our love. By listening to the Spirit in our lives we will

always be able to love and even when we do become encrusted so as to suffocate our love the Spirit will advocate for us. These times will never be easy but by listening to the Spirit we will always be able to love and in difficult times we will find ourselves surrounded by love.

How do I listen to the Holy Spirit? That is very simple but incredibly difficult. I need to follow the Psalmist advice and “be still and know that I am God”. I need to allow myself some time during my busy day to be still with God. Not filling the air with my needs but simply sitting in stillness and silence with God. Each time I do this simple practice of stillness I can feel the layers peeling off. If I let the Holy Spirit into my life I will love and in difficult times that will come I will find myself cradled in the love of those around me and the love of my God.