

We Are No Longer Orphans
Acts 8: 26-40, John 14: 15-21
May 14, 2006

Come Holy Spirit, fill our hearts and kindle in them the fire of your love. Amen.

Do you ever get discouraged? Do you ever get discouraged about the things you thought would always be there, but now are not? Like inexpensive gasoline? With tightened security measures in our country, some perceive that our individual civil rights will never again be as they once were. Do you ever get discouraged about things that are not right in your life or on our streets or in our world? I live in Long Beach and every day I feel bombarded by the news of street crimes and acts of violence that are almost commonplace. I can think of a lot of things that are not right in our world: global warming, ongoing unrest between Israel and Palestine, the unending Iraq war and daily news of soldiers' lives being cut short, human rights abuses and crimes against humanity abroad, particularly in Africa; news of children who go to bed hungry. At times I feel bombarded by disturbing news, where the mayhem of our society and world hit me with such an unrelenting force that I can't ignore it. The news isn't all bad, of course, but it's a certain fact that some things that happen don't point to a lot of hope. During those moments, I find myself asking, "Where is God in all of this?" How *do* we, as Christians, live out our faith in the midst of injustice and despair? It's a question we ask ourselves a lot, I think. That was a question faced also by the early Christians. Jesus told his disciples that soon he would be leaving. They found themselves having to live out their faith in a hostile, negative, rejecting world without him. I suspect that this engendered a lot of fear among the disciples—their guide and supporter and friend was leaving them.

Does God leave us alone to sort out all the mayhem? The fear of being left alone is deeply rooted and very real. We know that a small child playing alone is comforted when a parent says, "I'll be right back." As we grow older we learn to be more secure, but even as adults, when parents die, those fears return and somehow we feel abandoned. We know deep down that, this time, they won't be "right back." We feel orphaned and suddenly on our own; we feel cheated and forsaken. I suspect that's how the disciples felt when Jesus left. They were also faced with knowing that all was not right in their world.

But in today's gospel, Jesus tells the disciples, "I will not leave you desolate. I will come to you." In other words, "I'll be right back." His "I'll be right back" comes with the giving of the Spirit. He was giving another supporter—comforter---to take his place. But we live in a world today that neither sees nor knows

the Spirit. It's the same world that didn't recognize or receive Jesus during his ministry on earth. Jesus says, "I will not leave you orphans. I will send my Spirit and I will be with you. Love me and keep my commandments." His message is given almost in code, as if to say, 'The truly important things can't be seen with the eye, but only with the heart.' "I will send my Spirit and I will be with you. Love me and keep my commandments." The *world* couldn't see Jesus, but the *disciples* saw him and knew him. They "broke the code" and understood the message: loving God starts with loving one another.

Jesus not only gives the code, but also the 'key' to the code. The key is in the form of an invitation—to live a different life together, unlike the ways of the world. It's a new and unexpected invitation, which gives life.

But isn't it more difficult for us today to live out our faith in the midst of a hostile, negative, rejecting world? After all, the world that neither "sees" nor "knows" Christ is pretty dominant and terrifying to us today. How do we live it out? And how can we be assured that Easter counts for something, that we have not been orphaned?

We see it our reading from Acts, Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch is an early instance of the spread of the Christian message. Here we see the church moving into the world and being led by Christ's Spirit. God is at work in us, too. Perhaps for some of you the Easter faith is experienced through the caring and healing love that comes out of this community of St. Wilfrid.

We live it out not only in the community of faith, but in the family unit—in mothers—whom we honor today—and fathers. Our Christian faith is an incarnational faith. The love of a parent helps us to know and to see Christ. God is there for us through that person. I'm reminded of my friends John and Dee and their daughter Rachel. When Rachel was a young tyke of about five, she was terrified of thunderstorms. They lived in Kansas City—a place where real weather happens! Anyway, one night, in the middle of the night, a thunderstorm came up and Rachel woke up, terrified. She ran to her parents' room, where her parents reassured her by saying that it was just a storm, and that she was safe. As they took her back to her bed, they reminded her that God loved her and was with her. Well, the storm continued and once again, Rachel came running to her parents' room. "I know that God is with me," said little Rachel, "but what I need right now is somebody with skin!" As imperfect as we are, God's love comes to us through one another and, well, through our skin.

The discouraging moments will continue to be with us, I'm afraid. But God is at work in us. Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker Movement said, "But the final word is love...We cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other. Love comes with community." Our task, as Christians, is to make the universal specific, and the general concrete. Our job, then, is to allow God's Spirit to act in and through us in specific actions, in concrete kindness, and loving deeds.

Let us rely on the Spirit, remembering to trust, to dream, to risk, and to move on into glory, giving thanks to God.

The Rev. Christy Dorn
May 14, 2006
Easter 5
St. Wilfrid's
Year B