

Most of the gospels during these last several weeks of the Easter Season (both Sunday and weekdays) are taken from a section of John's gospel called the **Farewell Discourse** of Jesus. The Farewell Discourse is quite lengthy – 4 full chapters of the 21; it's the message spoken by Jesus to his Apostles as they sat at the table of the Last Supper on the night before he died. Jesus, of course, knew what was going to happen, and he wanted to reassure his disciples that even though they would see him die, he was not leaving them; he was going to continue to be with them. Today's readings turn our attention to the idea of *presence* – specifically how Jesus intended to continue to be present to his disciples after his death, resurrection, and ascension.

The issue of *presence* or its opposite *isolation* is a major social issue today. We are told that approximately 25% of all adults live alone; and that spouses, parents and children live as virtual strangers to one another. They may have 600 friends on *Facebook* and e-mail 25 people a day, but they are not discussing matters that are personally important. Twenty-five years ago,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the population said that they had a friend they could confide in. Today only  $\frac{1}{2}$  say they have such a friend.

One would think that with all the means and the ease of instant communication available to us today closer relationships would develop; we have e-mail, fax machines, cell phones, blackberries, texting, instant messaging, tweeting and twittering. Mark Motz is the Director of Communications and Publications at Xavier High School in Cincinnati; in

an article earlier this year, he wrote: “The inherent appeal of texting and e-mailing is in its very detachment. The digital realm is one of safe distance, devoid of that irksome, flesh and blood dimension. It is far, far easier to express oneself over WiFi or CAT5 cable than face to face.”

Sometimes we might think it would be nice if Jesus would be present to us in that way: advise us on what to do by means of a short little text message – delivered over a cell phone at just the right instant with his own distinctive little ring tone!

That isn't the way Jesus wants to be present to us. Jesus wants a much closer, much deeper, much more personal presence. Jesus wants to dwell within us. This is what he says in today's gospel: “Whoever loves me will keep my words, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our dwelling with them.” Jesus wants *his* Spirit to be in us. Jesus wants us to have the same Spirit he has. There's nothing superficial or trivial or shallow about this kind of presence. This presence is transformative; it permeates and inhabits our whole being; it gives new direction and holiness to all we think and say and do.

Above all, it's a presence that gives us peace. Jesus says in today's gospel: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” But he goes on to say: “Not as the world gives do I give it to you.” What we consider peace is not the same as what Jesus considers peace. For us, peace means the absence of war or the absence of conflict. The kind of

peace Jesus gives is not that kind of peace. As a matter of fact, Jesus calls us to be in conflict with the world. The kind of peace Jesus gives is a deep inner calm that enables us to face and deal with anything that goes on in our world; it enables us to accept whatever comes our way. The peace that Jesus gives is the peace that enabled him to accept the suffering of the cross – even in his innocence. The peace that Jesus gives is the peace that came from setting aside his own will, in order to do the will of the Father totally and completely. The peace that Jesus gives is the peace that comes from hearing and keeping the word he speaks because it's *always* true; it *never* deceives.

Jesus wants to live deeply and intimately in us. When we welcome the Spirit of Jesus within us, we live in peace, and we become the visible dwelling place of God.