

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

He is. And we have been celebrating it for quite a while. So why in the world is today's Gospel from John 14? Jesus speaks these words on the night before he dies, and today is the twenty-ninth day of Easter! What gives? Why these words now?

Good question. What Jesus says here prepares his disciples for what will happen on the fortieth day of Easter: his ascension, when he will visibly leave them. It isn't a particularly pleasant conversation.

Imagine a father sitting down with his three-year-old and saying, "Hey buddy. I am going away, and you can't come with me, and I can't tell you how long I'll be gone. But trust me, this is for the best."

Brutal, right? That is probably how the disciples feel as they listen to Jesus (John 16:6). On this night he repeatedly tells them that he is leaving (John 13:33, 36; 14:2-3). Yes, they are grown men, but they have only spent three years with Jesus, three years to prepare for life without him. And now he says, **"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me" (14:18-19).**

How? What does that even mean? The disciples are used to Jesus being in their lives in a very visible, obvious way. When they have questions, they ask him. When he works a miracle, they watch him. Now he is going, and making confusing promises about being seen and not seen at the same time. How are they supposed to feel about all this?

Well, how do you feel about it? You and I have never seen Jesus with our own eyes (1 Peter 1:8), but we can expect Jesus to be in our lives in very visible, obvious ways.

Ever thought to yourself, "I really want to feel happier. I want my guilt and grief and frustration and loneliness and regret to go away. And if Jesus is really here, I should feel him making a difference in my life."

Maybe you've prayed, "Lord, I really need these test results to come back negative. So if I'm not an orphan, answer my prayer. Lord, I am trying to be more patient with the people around me, to be the bigger person in this rotten relationship. So if I am not alone, reward my effort."

And when he doesn't, do you feel the same way about Jesus that you would about a parent who abandoned you? Are you frustrated or angry with him because he is not there the way that you expect him to be? Do you feel like he left you alone?

We want Jesus to be present in life in very specific ways. However, that is not how Jesus promises to be present. You see, Jesus is not really leaving. Ascension does not mean that Jesus is gone. It just means we can't see him. He withdraws his visible presence; departing in one way so that he can be with us in an even greater way.

That's the point of, **"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me" (14:18-19).** It's true that Jesus appears to his disciples after his resurrection, but only for forty days (Acts 1:3), so that can't be what he's talking about here. He has something way better in mind.

Listen to this: **"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you" (14:16-17).**

You are not alone. After Jesus goes, he will send the Holy Spirit, and ever since that Spirit brought you to faith, he lives in you as his temple (1 Corinthians 6:19). And he is not alone: **"On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you" (14:20).** Did you catch that? Jesus will no longer be present visibly, but he will be present in an even greater way – in their hearts.

Should they be glad about that? When was the last time you coped with a situation or cheered yourself up by saying, "It'll be okay. After all, I know that Jesus lives in my heart"? Probably never. I bet that you do not draw much comfort from this or even think about it very often. I know I don't.

Maybe it is too touchy feely for you. You know, Jesus living in your heart is something nice to tell the kids, but grownups move past it because you cannot feel it or understand it.

And it's not for lack of trying. Contemporary Christianity makes billions selling you the notion that if you just do the right thing or listen to the right music, you will feel Jesus. And over the centuries theologians have spilled a lot of ink dissecting this teaching. It even has a fancy theological name: the *unio mystica*, the mystic union.

We don't think about the mystic union very often, but we should. Here's why. Imagine that you walk into a motel room, and you immediately want to leave. The carpet is soggy. You peel back the sheets and there is a disgusting stain. The sink and the toilet and the shower are filthy. And there is this rank smell that permeates the room and pushes you out the door.

According to Scripture, that revolting room is good picture of the natural condition of your heart (Jeremiah 17:9), because it is by nature dead, rotting in its transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1).

So do you think that Jesus would want to live there, that he would want to call a place like that home? Not just for a few nights, but permanently? No way! The sinless Son of God cannot make his home in a place that is polluted by every kind of sin (Psalm 5:4).

And so the fact that he says, **"I am in you" (14:20)**, that he *has* made his home in your heart, is proof that the condition of your heart has changed (Ezekiel 36:26). It is proof that he means what he says when he promises, **"Because I live, you also will live" (14:19)**, proof that you are not dead in your sin but alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:5).

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection make your heart a home that is fit even for him (Psalm 51:10). That's good news! It's not a feeling for you to chase after; it is a reality that Jesus gives you.

How does he do it? How exactly does this mystic union happen? The way that Jesus gets into your heart is through the gospel (Romans 1:16). It's like that iconic image in Revelation 3, the picture of Jesus knocking at the door. When you encounter the gospel, Jesus stands at the door to your heart, knocking to get in (Revelation 3:20).

Who opens the door? It's got to be you; it's your door, right? Wrong. The Bible says that by nature when Jesus knocks at your door, you quickly turn off the TV, duck behind the couch, and stay real quiet until he goes away. When Jesus knocks at the human heart, by nature we want absolutely nothing but to keep him out (Romans 8:7). So it is not your job to open the door. It is the Holy Spirit's job (1 Corinthians 12:3).

The Spirit opens that door when the water of baptism is still wet on your forehead. You heard what Peter said in today's Second Reading, right? "Baptism now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). In baptism, God saves you; he takes the soggy, filthy, disgusting, rank sins that stain you, and washes them all away (Titus 3:5-6). Baptism is God's pledge that your conscience is clean and your soul is fit for divine habitation.

So in this mystic, mysterious way, Jesus lives with and in you. He is not an absentee parent, checking in every few years. He is here, within you. He pledged that when he put his name on you in the Word and water of baptism. He assures you of that when he puts his risen body and blood into your mouth. He proves that whenever you do what you are doing right now – listening to his words and promises. He has not left you as orphans! **You are not alone.**

But why is that such a big deal? Jesus tells you why, twice, at the beginning and at the end of today's Gospel: **"If you love me, keep my commands. ... Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me" (14:15, 21)**. Why has Jesus given you this promise that you are not an orphan? So that you are not afraid to live as who you are: someone who loves Jesus.

Because you live in a world that does not love Jesus, a world that doesn't even know what it means to love one another. In a world like that, you are different. In a world like that, you must "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). Your life is devoted to all that God commands – to loving him and loving one another (Matthew 22:37-39). That makes you a powerful witness to the truth of the gospel and its power to put Christ in your heart.

They can't see him, but they can see you. So show them Christ. And let the mystic union remind you that as you do that, as you keep Jesus' commands, **you are not alone.** He is right here, because Christ is risen, he is risen indeed! Alleluia and amen.