

Readings for Today: Acts 8: 5– 8, 14 - 17; Psalm 66 (65); I Peter 3: 15– 18; John 14: 15– 21.

Today's Gospel is one of the most difficult of the Sunday Gospels, so this reflection may seem to be rather heavy going! We need to remember that, although the setting is before the death and resurrection of Jesus, the evangelist is writing for believers who live after those transforming events – as we do.

The Gospel Reading includes the first of four uses in Christ's farewell discourse of the Greek word *parakletos* [14:16 & 26; 15:26; 16:7]. It appears in different translations as – Comforter, Support, Counsellor, Helper, Intercessor, Befriender, Advocate – and sometimes (especially in hymns) just transliterated as Paraclete. The literal translation of *parakletos* is 'someone called alongside', and its ordinary use is of an assistant in a law court – hence Advocate. But in the Gospel the meaning does not seem to be primarily legal. It is related to the New Testament words (i) for preaching the good news of Jesus, and (ii) for bringing consolation to those who suffer.

Jesus says that the Father will give the disciples another *paraklete*, which implies that they already have one – presumably Jesus himself – who performs the task of proclaiming the good news. In John's theology the good news is that Jesus is the one sent from the Father, who speaks his word and always does his will. But Jesus is about to go away, and will not be present to teach or to support them. So he tells them: *I will ask the Father and he will give you another paraklete, the Spirit of truth.* The difference between these two *parakletes* is that while the world has been able to see Jesus it won't be able to see, or even know, the Spirit: But the disciples (the evangelist is thinking of all future disciples of Jesus) will know him because he is already with them and in them. Jesus then tells the disciples that when, sooner than they think, he leaves them, and the world can no longer see him, they will see him. He will come to them, because he will be alive – and they will live too. And then the difficult truth he has been trying to teach them will be clear: *You will understand that I am in the Father.* They will also understand that they are in Jesus and he is in them – so they are united to the Father.

There is just one condition to this understanding: it is possible for anyone who receives and keeps the commandments of Jesus – particularly, we may assume, the commandment he gave at the Last Supper: *Love one another.* By receiving and keeping these commandments the disciple will be caught up in the love which flows between the Father and the Son.