

Sermon for Pentecost | 2026
By Fr. Hayden A. Butler

The Book of II Kings opens with the prophet Elijah preparing for his imminent death. As the hour drew near, he asked his apprentice Elisha what he would request of him before he departed: “Elijah said to Elisha, 'Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?’ Elisha said, “Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.” So he said, “You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so.” Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried out, “My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!” So he saw him no more.”

In our Gospel Lesson this morning, in which we are taken again to the Last Supper, Jesus promises His disciples that, “I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me.” Jesus’ words at the last supper refer back to the story of II Kings and show how Elijah’s departure foreshadows and is fulfilled by the Ascension of Christ and the Coming of the Holy Spirit. On the Mount of Olives, Christ ascended into heaven in the sight of his disciples, and then was seen no more by them. Then, in the upper room of Jerusalem, the disciples with the Blessed Virgin received the Holy Spirit, falling upon them as tongues of fire. Immediately, the disciples went out with boldness to do the very things that Christ Himself did. The message of this Scriptural connection is clear: the same Spirit that alighted on Christ at His Baptism, that led Him through the wilderness, empowered His signs, sustained Him through the Passion, and raised Him from the dead had now alighted upon His chosen ones so that as Christ is, so they may be. “As I live,” Christ says, “so you will live also.”

Even so, the Gospel Lesson teaches us that the first way the Spirit is known to us is as the Comforter who ensures that we are not left as orphans. As we have been experiencing in the Gospel Lessons for the past several weeks, our Lord is intent on showing us that His ascension does not mean His absence from us, that He remains forever “God with us.” And so, before the Spirit’s presence will mean conversion, renewal, empowerment, and illumination, it will mean the restoration of our communion with God and the knowledge of God as Father, Son, and Spirit. Just as the Spirit unites the Father and Son in love, so the Spirit will unite the disciple with the Father and Son in love. “As I live, so you will live also.” The Spirit will make us in Christ, and the Spirit makes Christ in the Father and in us. Because of this, we can know our Lord’s Father as “our Father.” And because this relation never dies so long as we remain in Christ, it means that we will not and cannot be orphans, ever. As the Psalmist declares: “Even if my father and my mother abandoned me, the Lord would take me in.”

The fact of our adoption as the children of the Father in Christ through the Spirit is the basis of our ability to love Christ by keeping His commandments and remembering Christ, though we do not see Him. When Christ says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments,” it is not to lay conditions on the love of God as though our obedience made us worthy of His love. As St. John clarifies in His Epistle, “We love because He first loved us.” Rather, our Lord is referring to ancient standards of establishing paternity. Long before genetic testing, one of the primary ways paternity was identified was by how a child’s character and manner came to reflect their father’s character and manner. This comes up another place in John’s Gospel when the Pharisees insinuate that Jesus was illegitimate: As our Lord said to them: “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God”... Then they said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God... You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.” To keep Christ’s commandments means that we are doing the works of our Father, who loves us before we do so, but whose will is that we become His true sons and daughters.

Our struggles to keep Christ’s commandments in love, our struggles to do the works of our heavenly Father, come from our struggles to remember what is not apparent in the moment. This is why the Spirit’s ministry to us is to ‘remember’ Christ within us, to make us know Him even when He is not presented to our vision. What our spiritual tradition sometimes calls ‘recollection’ is a form of prayer by which we come back in the ‘knower’ of the heart to perceive what we are and what is ours to do. This can sometimes involve the imagination, but more often it involves a movement of the will to live as though we are, in fact, the children of God, brothers and sisters with Christ, and surrounded by innumerable angels, archangels, and saints. It means that we practice living with a secure attachment to God, one that is not made anxious by our being sent out to work and play, safe in the knowledge that our Father will be there for us to go back to, and in fact is never far away. It means living as though, from the deepest place, we are seen—sought out and understood in love; we are safe—our needs are met, and we are watched over; we are soothed—given the strength of someone stronger in our distress; and we are secure—given the confidence that we are capable because we are becoming like the one who loves us.

Nearly all of our temptations to sin are rooted in the satanic suggestion that we will be abandoned, and so we need to provide for ourselves. It pulls at one of our deepest longings. But Christ promises that we will not be left as orphans, we will not be left alone. Loneliness did not exist anywhere in the eternity of God, and all loneliness in the world is now tenuous because the Spirit has filled the world. When the Spirit comes, so will Christ; and when Christ comes, so does our Father. Just as Christ began His ministry in the words of His Father: “you are my beloved,” so we embark into Trinitytide with the same words sung in love over us. We are not

alone. We cannot be alone. Therefore, as Jesus said: “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”