

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER—2017

We have just heard those comforting words from Jesus as he makes a powerful promise to his followers, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.” For the disciples and for us they truly are words of reassurance: “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you . . .” What Jesus shares with us in the Gospel is that no one ever really needs to live as an orphan. There is always someone who cares about us.

When I think of orphans, many images come to mind. How many children have been left without parents because of disasters, war or violence? What about the children of parents who are taken away because of accidents or drugs? We can even include those children who lose parents because of divorce or those whose parents give over their children for adoption because of their inability to care for them.

If we think about it, there are few things that can be more traumatic for human beings than to be orphaned at a young age. What can be more tragic than to be deprived of the love of a parent? It takes a lot of time and effort and a lot of help to move beyond the deprivation of this most basic of human needs. While difficult, it is far from impossible. Some very famous people have found themselves in this position. If *Google* “famous orphans,” you will see the names of many outstanding people from many different fields who were able to accomplish much in life in spite of this misfortune.

When Eleanor Roosevelt was 8 years old, her mother, Anna Rebecca Hall, died from diphtheria in 1892. The next year, when she was 9 years old, her father Elliott died from the same disease. Eleanor was raised by her maternal grandmother. This is probably the experience that gave Eleanor her great compassion for suffering people the world over when she became this country’s First Lady, as well as in her service as a diplomat, author and writer.

Some other notable people were orphaned, not by the death of their parents, but because of a break-up of their families which resulted in them being put up for adoption. Among them we find Steve Jobs, Nelson Mandela, musician John Lennon, President Andrew Jackson, and many others. Many great people have found themselves orphaned.

Bringing it closer to home, there are those among us who relate to this first hand. Along with those who went through the experience as true orphans, I believe that there are times when all of us feel like orphans. That is, there are times when we all feel helpless, alone, forsaken. In our own lives those of us who have lost our parents or spouses, whether we are aware of it or not, there is that sense of loss and finding oneself alone. One can have that experience when it hits home that we ourselves are eventually going to pass through those gates of death. It can also come from such things as sickness, family problems, or loss of a job.

In the midst of these experiences it can seem that even God has forsaken us. As one like us in his

humanity, even Jesus went through this. On the cross Jesus called out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” However briefly, Jesus himself had that experience of being orphaned. That was followed by Jesus entrusting himself to the Father as he said, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.

Whatever anyone is going through, bottom line, even if it just seems to be God, someone really does care. Usually, along with God, there are others who really care for us, reminding us that we are never alone. In that experience of those who care for us, comes a power that helps us get through whatever we are going through, even though we might not see how it will all work out. Sometimes it takes time.

Jesus made that promise to the disciples even though they did not understand it at the moment. They couldn't imagine that in a couple more days he would be put to death. And they certainly couldn't imagine that he would be resurrected on the third day or that he would send his Holy Spirit upon them fifty days later on the day of Pentecost. But everything he foretold came true. And it is still true today. If we or someone we are caring for is going through a difficult time right now, let us pray today that we or that loved one may take Jesus at his word when he says, “I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you.” Let us remember also those words from the Old Testament when we hear Lord says, “Even if your mother would ever forget you, I will never forget you.” That truly is the good news of the Gospel and meant for you and me today.

Rather than a joke today, I'd like to share with you a poem about adoption that I recently came across. These are words from an adoptive Mother to her adopted child:

Once there were two women who never knew each other.
One you might not remember, the other you now call Mom.
Two different lives shaped you to make you one.
One became your guiding star, the other became your sun.
The first one gave you life, and the second taught you to live it.
The first gave you a need for love, the second was there to give it.
One gave you a nationality, the other gave you a name.
One gave you potential, the other gave you direction and aim.
One gave you emotions, the other shared your joys and calmed your fears.
One saw your first sweet smile, the other dried you tears.
One made an adoption plan, that was all that she could do.
The other prayed for a child, and God led her straight to you.
Now, which of these two women are you the product of?
Both, my little one. Both.
You are one, a precious treasure formed from two special types of true love.