

Homily 5-21-17

What do all these people have in common -- Steve Jobs, Eleanor Roosevelt, Edgar Allen Poe, John Lennon, Aristotle, Ray Charles, Johan Sebastian Bach, Batman and Robin, Tarzan, Clark Kent, Cinderella and Snow White? They are all orphans. They all grew up without parents or were put up for adoption. We don't know what their lives would have been like if they were not orphans. But Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson became Batman and Robin, the crime-fighting good guys of Gotham City. Cinderella would not have needed her fairy godmother's help, maybe never lost a shoe, and might not have ever married Prince Charming. Snow White would not have needed the kiss of her prince if she had not been mistreated by a mean stepmother. Clark Kent's mom and dad sent him away to escape the destruction of the planet Krypton. We know the rest of his story as Superman.

No matter how young or old we are when it happens, losing a parent, or both parents, is a life changer. In a sense it marks the end of our world as we once knew it. You remember Little Orphan Annie and her 'hard knock life' in the orphanage, no family, no care and concern, no one to tuck her into bed or buy her Christmas gifts? But then her story turns around when she is adopted. She goes from rags to riches.

In the gospel today, Our Blessed Lord promised his friends that he would not leave them orphans. He knew what he was talking about. He was no stranger to loss. From the cross he called out, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me"? Even our Lord felt like an orphan at that moment. He's been there and done that. He is promising that his coming absence will not leave them orphans because he will send to them, and to us, his promised gift of the Holy Spirit. If you don't remember anything else of what I say today, maybe this is the most important idea. When our Lord was in the flesh 20 centuries ago and walked on the very earth he created, he was always outside of people. But because he returns to the Father and they send the Holy Spirit, now God can get inside of us. That's the promise fulfilled. 'I will not leave you orphans'. The Ascension of Christ, which we will celebrate next weekend, does not mean the absence of Christ. He ascends; but he does not abandon. He is going; but he is staying. Another great Christian paradox. To make sure that he is always in our midst he gives us the sacrament of the Eucharist. The Holy Spirit changes bread and wine into his body and blood. We can be in his presence whenever we come to worship in his house or when we just visit with him in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar. Something we take way too often for granted. He comes on our altars and meets us in the sacraments. He gave us Mary to be our mother, the Saints to be heavenly intercessors, and each other to be brothers and sisters in the body of Christ.

Saying goodbye to a loved one can be difficult-- a graduate heading off to college, a soldier going to war, a friend who moves away, and death itself. Our Lord is saying

'goodbye' to his friends today. But what kind of goodbye will this be? Hopeless? Senseless? No. Beyond the sorrow there is cause for hope and joy. Our Blessed Lord is with us in this "hard knock life" of trial and tribulation. He promised a heavenly mansion to his faithful friends. He is with us now in the power, person and presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit who helps us to remember and to believe. The Spirit who makes us his adopted sons and daughters in the sacrament of Christian baptism. The Spirit in whom we cry out, "Abba, Father".

Sheldon Vanauken was a friend of the great Christian writer CS Lewis. Vanauken had just lost his wife to cancer. The two friends had lunch together and talked about death in the course of their conversation. When it came time to part, Lewis suggested that they keep in touch, and then he said with a cheerful grin, "We will certainly meet again here or there". They shook hands and Lewis made his way across the street. Then he turned back to Vanauken, raised his voice above the traffic and shouted, "Besides, Christians never say goodbye". There are times when we all feel like orphans, alone in the world. But for Christians there is always hope and joy. God will not forsake us. That is his promise. Do we believe it?

God love you!