

Reflection on the Gospel - Easter 6A
(John 14:15-21)

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Those who defend themselves in court run the risk of being outsmarted by clever and sometimes unscrupulous adversaries. It is never a good idea to be too self-reliant even in a country with a basically sound legal system such as ours. Today's gospel implies that the disciples need a defense attorney or lawyer. Jesus has acted in that capacity for them in their struggles with the anti-gospel forces arrayed against them.

Now he is close to death and he gives them instructions that begin and end with reference to loving him and keeping his commandments. Jesus has given them 'a new commandment' (13:34-35): '...that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.' Later in this discourse (15:12-14) the reader of the gospel learns what the actors in the drama already know about Jesus' commandments. 'This is my commandment,' says Jesus, 'that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.' This is no small demand, to be prepared to die for one another.

The disciples cannot live out such a commitment on their own, given the opposition they are likely to face. Neither is Jesus leaving them 'orphans' who have to fend for themselves. He will ask his Father to provide 'another' defender or advocate who will act on their behalf, an advocate who will always be there. This new advocate is the 'Spirit of truth'. As we approach the end of the Easter season, the liturgy thus points us in the direction of Pentecost and the gift of God's Spirit.

It is good to know we are never on our own. It is also good to reflect on the capacity we have for love. Most of us will never find ourselves in a situation where our love is tested to the point that we have to die for another. On the other hand, we are constantly being called on to put the well-being of others, even their survival, before our own comfort. With global warming and the life-style changes that will inevitably come sooner rather than later, we may well find ourselves 'laying down our lives' in various ways for the sake of our friends, humankind and other-kind, across the planet. With the help of the Spirit, our Advocate, we can surely rise to the challenge.