

St. Ann's Church – Washington, DC
Sixth Sunday of Easter 2020 – May 17, 2020

Homily by Msgr. Watkins, Pastor

My dear Parishioners and Friends of St. Ann's Church,

I greet all of you who join us by way of social media today for our celebration of the Easter Season on this, the Sixth Sunday of Easter. So many of us are still wondering when this difficult ordeal of the contagion of the coronavirus will be over. By now, after several months of this crisis, I submit that many are WANDERING or WONDERING. I say, "Wandering," because wandering means more or less, "I don't know what's going on. I'm confused. I'm afraid. I'm uncertain." In fact, we hear that often said phrase, "In these uncertain times." That's natural. That's expected. WANDERING is the result of fear, and there is much to be afraid about. Wandering is what we naturally do when we don't know the answers. We wander. WONDERING, on the other hand, is what happens when we take all of that wandering and all that goes with it and transform all of that doubt and fear and unknown and uncertainty into a far more powerful force of TRUST. To WONDER is to acknowledge first that I am not God, that I am not totally in control of my life or the world, to stand humbly before the Almighty and acknowledge a deep-seated need for God in my life. To WONDER is to acknowledge that there is a power, a being, a power beyond myself and beyond all of us combined. To WONDER is to realize that even the best of minds, the best of all of us as human beings, the best that we can muster with all of our brilliance and skill and knowledge and engineering ability cannot solve this crisis. The larger issue at stake here is NOT how do we solve the coronavirus pandemic – as critical as it is. The bigger picture is NOT what will life be like in the "new normal" (as the phrase goes). The real crisis is the choice each of us must make between Wandering and Wondering, between opting for spiritual confusion or opting for spiritual clarity.

Now, today, we are invited back to WONDER, not WANDER. So, we are invited by God's grace to move away from WANDERING to WONDERING, from spiritual

confusion to spiritual clarity. Let's reflect on one aspect of spiritual clarity which comes from the Gospel for our a deeper, more mature, wiser insight into the mystery of God revealed in Jesus through today's Gospel.

Today, I'm Wondering about what Jesus means when He says, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." Do you ever despair? Despair is the result of Wandering. Again, "I don't know what to do," or "I'm giving up," or "There's no use," or "It's too hard." In the midst of all of those feelings, Jesus says, "I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you." Once we hear those reassuring words, we can be moved by grace from Wandering to now Wondering. Wondering what? Wondering how does He do that? How does our divine Lord come to you? What does that mean, we wonder.

Well, one way Jesus comes to you is through His divine Word. So, we read the Scriptures and find ourselves wondering. He comes often in the silence, and He comes in the quiet storm of our lives. He comes through the pandemic around us and penetrates that storm with His mighty Word. He says in the midst of it all throughout this Easter Season, we recall, words like, "Do not be afraid. Peace be with you. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God and faith in me." And today, once again, in John's Gospel, He says, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate." We all need an advocate. Everyone needs a mentor, a helper, a friend, one we can look up to and trust that whatever they say, whatever they do, we will trust that all will be OK. My advocate is that person who speaks on my behalf, works on my behalf, does things for me because they love me, they want to help me out in my time of need, "to be there for me," we say. The only way my advocate can work it for me is if I stay close to him/to her and trust. If I wander from the advocate, it won't work. I stay close to the advocate, that special friend, and trust that what they say they will do, they will in fact do, that everything they promised they would do, they will do. All I have to do is wait and wonder, not WANDER.

And isn't this what our divine Lord does through the Holy Spirit. By that special gift of the person of God, the third person of God, the Holy Spirit, the Lord sends us an Advocate, that special friend. Friends can only grow together if they stay together, work together, trust together. Friendship is a mysterious gift of love, when it's a true friendship. Friends wonder about each other; they don't wander from each other. So, in giving us an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, as He promised

those first disciples 2000 years ago, he continues to send us the gift of the Holy Spirit now through His Church on earth through His Word and Sacraments to sustain us in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, in the ups and downs of life, in suffering, in pain, in loneliness, in joys, in sorrows, throughout the whole spectrum of life and death. This most powerful advocate always “has our back,” we say, or “is there for me,” absolutely. There is no uncertainty about this. Jesus cannot lie or deceive. His Words are true and always life-giving. But they can only be effective if there is a wondering trust, not a wandering away. And this, dear friends, is, as I said, perhaps the most critical issue at stake in our times, indeed in every time. It’s just that the current circumstances seem to inflame this distinction between spiritual wandering and spiritual wondering, between MIS-Trust and TRUST.

Now, I can grow in trust only if I can believe you. I can’t trust anyone whom I don’t believe. But you believe Him. You believe Him because you trust Him. Now friends are truly friends if they trust each other. And friends are true friends when they speak heart to heart. So, the Holy Spirit speaks to you – His divine Heart to your heart. I wonder what He might be saying to you today.

Allow me to quote a beautiful poem, which I think in some way, could inspire you to wonder about God’s incredible love for you today and every day. So often we lift our voices in prayer. Today, perhaps the Advocate has something to say to you as you wonder about His immense care, concern, and reverence for you, especially in these times.

Jorge Borges writes:

I cannot give you solutions to all life’s problems. Nor do I have the answers to your doubts or fears. But I can listen to you and share it with you. I cannot change neither your past nor your future. But when you need me, I’ll be by your side. I cannot prevent you from stumbling. I can only offer you my hand to hold on to you so you won’t fall. Your joys, your victories, your successes are not mine but I truly enjoy it when I see you happy. I do not judge the decisions you take in life. I constrain myself to support you, to stimulate and to help you if you ask me to. I cannot draw limits for you within which you must act, but I can offer you the space needed to grow. I cannot avert your sufferings when some pain is breaking your heart, but I can cry with you and pick up the pieces to armour it again. I cannot tell you who you are, nor who you should be. I can only love you as you

are and be our friend. These days, I have been thinking about my friends, amongst whom you appeared. You were neither on top, nor on the bottom, nor in the middle. You were not heading nor concluding the list. You were not the first number, nor the last. And neither do I pretend to be the first, the second, or the third on your list. It's enough if you want me as a friend. Thank you for being one.

What a friend in the Holy Spirit. This, rather HE, is the great gift who makes us wonder about God, and thereby grow closer to HIM rather than wander away from Him. And He is most personally close to us today by power of that same Spirit at this Mass and at every Mass when His divine Words once again speak immortal truth, "This is my Body. This is my Blood ... for you." All of this is His gift to you, for you.

Wonder in Trust. Do not wander in MIS-Trust. All will be well. Trust me, He says. I know how to handle this. I have your back. I'm there for you. Believe me.