

## Historic Commentary

(Sixth Sunday of Eastertide - Year C)



The Liturgy Letter

### A Selection of Church Fathers and John Calvin on John 14:23-29.

\*Compiled by the Rev. Eric Dirksen.

Augustine: The saints are distinguished from the world by that love that moves those who are of one mind to dwell together in a house. In this house Father and Son make their home and impart that very love to those whom they shall also honor at last with this promised self-manifestation that the disciple asked his master about.

Augustine: God is not too grand to come, he is not too fussy or shy, he is not too proud—on the contrary he is pleased to come if you do not displease him. Listen to the promise he makes. Listen to him indeed promising with pleasure, not threatening in displeasure, “We shall come to him,” he says, “I and the Father.” To the one he had earlier called his friend, the one who obeys his precepts, the keeper of his commandment, the lover of God, the lover of his neighbor, he says, “We shall come to him and make our abode with him.

Augustine: So then the Son speaks, the Holy Spirit teaches. When the Son speaks, we take in the words; when the Holy Spirit teaches, we understand those words.... The whole Trinity indeed both speaks and teaches, but unless each person worked separately as well, the whole would be too much for human infirmity to take in.

Augustine: The text says the Spirit will, “Suggest,” that is, “bring to your remembrance.” Every wholesome hint to remember that we receive is of the grace of the Spirit.

Augustine: Whenever ... it seems that the Son is shown to be less than the Father, interpret it as spoken ... not to show one is greater or less than the other but ... that one has his origin from the other.

Chrysostom: Jesus is all but saying here, “How are you harmed by the trouble of the world, provided that you are at peace with me? For this peace is not the same as the world’s peace. The world’s peace is external and often more hurtful than profitable, and it is of no real advantage to those who possess it. But I give you the kind of peace that calls for peace with one another. This makes you stronger.

Gregory the Great: The proof of love is its manifestation in deeds. This is why John says in his letter, “He who says, ‘I love God’ and does not observe his commandments is a liar.” Our love is true if we keep our self-will in check according to his commandments. One who is still wandering here and there through his unlawful desires does not really love God, because he is opposing him in his self-will.

Gregory the Great: Consider, dearly beloved, how great this solemnity is that commemorates the coming of God as a guest in our hearts. If some rich and powerful friend were to enter your home, you would quickly clean the entire house for fear something there might offend your friend’s eyes when he entered. Let anyone then who is preparing his inner house for God cleanse away the dirt of his evil deeds.... He does indeed enter the hearts of some but does not make his home there because through repentance they acquire respect for God, but during a time of temptation they forget that they have repented and so return to committing sins as if they had never wept over them at all. The Lord comes into the heart and makes his home in one who truly loves God and observes his commandments, since the love of his divine nature so penetrates him that he does not turn away from it during times of temptation. That person loves truly whose heart does not consent to be overcome by wicked pleasures.

Ambrose: It is only right that heaven is first and last in the creation of the world, for heaven also has what is beyond heaven, the God of heaven who says, “Heaven is my throne.” For God does not sit above the element of heaven but in the heart of humankind. For this reason the Lord also says, “We will come to them and make our home with them.” Heaven, therefore, is the first of the works on earth. Human beings are the close or end or last of his works.

Leo the Great: He withdrew his bodily presence for a time, for he is to abide at the right hand of the Father until the times that have been divinely decreed for the multiplication of the children of the church are accomplished. And then in the same body in which he ascended he will come again to judge the living and the dead. And so what was visible in Christ is now veiled in mystery. And, so that faith might be more perfect and more steadfast, vision was succeeded by revealed truth whose authority the hearts of the faithful, illumined by light from above, would now begin to follow.

Gregory the Great: Many of you, dearly beloved, know that the Greek word *Paraclete* means in Latin “advocate” or “consoler.” He is called an advocate because he intervenes before the Father’s justice on behalf of the wrongdoings of sinners. He who is of one substance with the Father, and the Son is said to plead earnestly on behalf of sinners because he causes those whom he fills to do so. This is why Paul says, “For the Spirit himself pleads for us with unutterable groanings.” But one who pleads is of less importance than the one receiving the plea. How is the Spirit, then, who is not less important, said to plead? The Spirit pleads, rousing those he fills to plead. The same Spirit is called a consoler because when he prepares a hope of pardon for those grieving over their sins he is lifting up their hearts from sorrow and affliction.

**Basil the Great:** The Spirit is simple in being. His powers are many. They are entirely present everywhere and in everything. He is distributed but does not change. He is shared yet remains whole. Consider the analogy of the sunbeam: each person on whom its kindly light falls rejoices as if the sun existed for him alone, yet it illumines land and sea and is master of the atmosphere. In the same way, the Spirit is given to each one who receives him as if he were the possession of that person alone, yet he sends forth sufficient grace to fill the entire universe. Everything that partakes of his grace is filled with joy according to its capacity—the capacity of its nature, not of his power.

**Ambrose** The fruit of peace is the absence of disturbance in the heart. In short, the life of the righteous person is calm, but the unrighteous person is filled with disquiet and disturbance. Therefore the ungodly person is struck down more by his own suspicions than most people are by the blows of others, and the stripes of the wounds in his soul are greater than those in the bodies of those who are lashed by others.

**Cyprian:** The person of peace ought to seek peace and follow it. The one who knows and loves the bond of charity ought to refrain his tongue from the evil of dissension. Among his divine commands and salutary teachings, the Lord, when he was now very near to his passion, added this one, saying, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.” He gave this to us as an inheritance. He promised all the gifts and rewards of which he spoke through the preservation of peace. If we are fellow heirs with Christ, let us abide in the peace of Christ. If we are children of God, we ought to be peacemakers. “Blessed,” says he, “are the peacemakers. For they shall be called the sons of God.” It behooves the children of God to be peacemakers, gentle in heart, simple in speech, agreeing in affection, faithfully linked to one another in the bonds of unanimity.

**Cyril of Alexandria:** Jesus soothes the agony of grief he found in his disciples, and just as a beloved and good father, compelled for some legitimate reason to take his children from the nurse that bears them, and seeing a flood of tears flowing down their delicate cheeks, he coaxes them by insisting on the good that will result from her absence and arms them against grief with hope. So also our Lord Jesus Christ shields the souls of his saints from sorrow. For he knew, being truly God, that his abandonment of them would be hard for them to take, even though he would always be with them through the Spirit. This proves his love and extreme holiness.

**John Calvin:** We have already explained that the love of God to us is not placed in the second rank, as if it came after our piety as the cause of that love, but that believers may be fully convinced that the obedience which they render to the Gospel is pleasing to God, and that they may continually expect from him fresh additions of gifts.

**John Calvin** (on verse 25): These things I have spoken to you. He adds this, that they may not despair, though they may have profited less than they ought to have done; for at that time he scattered a seed of doctrine, which lay hidden, and, as it were, suffocated in the disciples. He therefore exhorts them to entertain good hopes, until fruit be yielded by the doctrine which might now appear to be useless. In short, he testifies that in the doctrine which they had heard they have abundant ground of consolation, and that they ought not

to seek it anywhere else. And if they do not immediately see it, he bids them be of good courage, until the Holy Spirit, who is the inward Teacher, speak the same thing in their hearts. This admonition is highly useful to all; for, if we do not immediately understand what Christ teaches, we begin to grow weary, and grudge to bestow unprofitable labor on what is obscure. But we must bring an eager desire to receive instruction; we must lend our ears and give attention, if we desire to make due proficiency in the school of God; and especially we need patience, until the Holy Spirit enable us to understand what we thought that we had often read or heard to no purpose. That the desire of learning may not be weakened in us, or that we may not fall into despair, when we do not immediately perceive the meaning of Christ speaking to us, let us know that this is spoken to us all.

John Calvin: It is no ground for alarm, he tells them; for they want only his bodily presence, but will enjoy his actual presence through the Spirit. Let us learn to be always satisfied with this kind of presence, and let us not give a loose reign to the flesh, which always binds God by its outward inventions.

John Calvin: “For the Father is greater than I.” This passage has been tortured in various ways...

To make the matter more clear, we must use still greater plainness of speech. Christ does not here make a comparison between the Divinity of the Father and his own, nor between his own human nature and the Divine essence of the Father, but rather between his present state and the heavenly glory, to which he would soon afterwards be received; as if he had said, “You wish to detain me in the world, but it is better that I should ascend to heaven.” Let us therefore learn to behold Christ humbled in the flesh, so that he may conduct us to the fountain of a blessed immortality; for he was not appointed to be our guide, merely to raise us to the sphere of the moon or of the sun, but to make us one with God the Father.