

May 1, 2016 The Advocate Homily: Brothers and sisters, American Justice demands that a citizen accused of committing a felony is entitled to a criminal defense. By law, a hired lawyer is normally on hand to represent the accused, his client, in court proceedings. Ah! But what if the accused is poor and vulnerable? What if he is one who has fallen through the cracks and nobody cares about? Enter the Public Defender, an attorney who is appointed by the court to defend those who are at a severe disadvantage because of their low economic status. The poor do not have at their disposal a "dream team", a group of high priced lawyers who demand exorbitant fees for their services. They simply cannot afford them. Instead, they must rely on those who, in most cases, are total strangers. The Public Defender is the advocate of the accused felon and sometimes a true friend to one who, most likely, feels alone and is badly frightened.

No less than five times in John's gospel do we hear the word "Paraclete". The background of this word is worth noting. According to biblical scholars, it is a legal term for an attorney who defends the cause of the accused in a courtroom. The word is sometimes translated as "Advocate", "Helper" and "Counselor". The Paraclete is, of course, the Holy Spirit.

In today's gospel Jesus offers words of farewell to his disciple (the so-called farewell discourse). It is the night of the Last Supper and He is preparing them for his abrupt departure. The shadow of the cross is lengthening. He speaks with great candor of going away. He forewarns them "In a little while the world will not see me" (Jn.14:19). Jesus is exiting the stage. The second act is drawing to a close. Quite understandably, the disciples of Our Lord are troubled and fearful. Will they, too, be defenseless and alone? Certainly not! There is a third act!

Jesus promises them that they would not be orphaned (Jn.14:18). The Holy Spirit (Paraclete) will be sent to strengthen the disciples in the absence of Jesus and to instruct them in the truth (Jn.14:26). True to his word, his promise was fulfilled on Easter Sunday night when he handed over His Spirit.

And the lesson to be learned here is that the Christian is never alone! This truth of our faith became abundantly clear to me upon viewing recently the grisly video of Coptic Christian men in Egypt beheaded by the Muslim soldiers of ISIS. Quite remarkably, the hooded victims, all innocent of any crime, were serene as they awaited their unjust, violent death. Their composure was so striking. No obscenities were hurled at their captors, no cries of vengeance were heard in the killing field. In the final hours of their life, the "Advocate", the Holy Spirit strengthened them. They died as Christian martyrs. What a consolation and joy to realize that we have not been left orphaned. Christ lives and he sends forth His Spirit!

Amen!