

## Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

### 14th May 2023 - 6th Sunday of Easter

Readings (Year A): 1st: Acts 8:5-8,14-17. 2nd: 1 Peter 3:15-18. **Gospel:** John 14:15-21

‘A lonely world without God’ a headline in the Catholic Herald reviewing an English edition of a book from the French ‘Pastoral care for loneliness.’ The book, by Matthew Fforde, first appeared in 2020 in the wake of the world-wide lockdown when loneliness became a real prospect for many people.

It does not take the compulsory cessation of social activities to create loneliness, of course. As Pope Francis observed in May 2020, *“Our time is marked by loneliness and indifference, which generate loneliness and lead to a throwing away of many lives. This is our culture today. Individualism, indifference, which generate loneliness and cause rejection; the throw away culture.”*

Fforde notes that even without the impact of the pandemic, loneliness was and still is an ‘epidemic of our times.’ Loneliness is not just a fleeting sadness, but an ailment that plagues society - ironically at a time when we are more connected than ever with social media, iphone and constant entertainment for our distraction.

Yet none of these can provide the human interactions we need and for which so many people in our communities evidently long. A 2019 opinion poll reported that more than a quarter of young people felt that their life was devoid of purpose.

A shocking realisation, which Fforde lays significant blame on “dechristianisation.” He argues that a vacuum in society and personhood that was previously filled by faith leads to disaffection and isolation. What they need is faith, hope and love, that is God, revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus, knowing his departure back to the Father and the removal of his physical presence would leave the disciples bereft, promises his coming in a greater more dynamic presence. Jesus speaks of another Advocate, another Helper who will be with them for ever. *‘I will not leave you orphans.’*

The disciples are not left without a leader, guide or father. We are not ever alone. The most astounding promise of Jesus is about sharing his own relationship with the Father with us.

This consolation is in the promise of the Holy Spirit as the *Paraclete* (Greek) or *Advocatus* (Latin) meaning someone called beside you. It is a legal term for an attorney or spokesperson who defends the cause of the accused in a courtroom.

Jesus uses it for the Holy Spirit, God’s love ever beside us, the divine friend who whispers comfort to the heart and light to the mind. To be comforted literally means to be strong with (*Comfortis*) the support of somebody. A comforter is one who brings inner strength.

The promise of Jesus is that the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of truth, would give immense inner strength to all who believe. The word spirit means breath. The air that we breathe is unseen but absolutely essential. We would stifle and choke without it.

We long for a deep breath of fresh air to renew our vitality.

We receive a call to be no longer merely human.

We are called to let God live in us, know in us, work in us, and love through us.

That breath of God’s life is given to us in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus, as Eastertide moves on preparing us for Pentecost.

Fforde sees part of our task as we are sent out from Mass the business of ‘keeping Christ company’ in the lonely, and unloved, whoever they may be.