

6 Sunday of Easter

From one of the musicals came a song that has captured the affections of millions of people. It is called “You Never Walk Alone,” and it goes like this:

“When you walk through a storm,
Hold your head up high,
And don’t be afraid of the dark.
At the end of the storm is a golden sky
And the Sweet, silver song of a lark.
Walk on through the winds;
Walk on through the rain,
Though your dreams be tossed and blown.
Walk on; walk on with hope in your heart,
And you will never walk alone;
No, you will never walk alone.

The appeal of the song is easy to understand, because it deals with one of the deepest desires and highest hopes of human heart – the assurance of Divine Presence that stays besides us and shares with us in all the experiences of life.

Jesus recognized this desire and talked about it in today’s Gospel reading. He said: “Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.”

Whenever Jesus thought and spoke of God, it was always in terms such as that – a loving Father who never forgets or forsakes his children. In contrast to that our thoughts are completely different – God is up there in heaven. God is back there in history. God is out there in the future. And such thinking is true in so far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. To stop with a God who is up there, back there, out there is to miss the greatest truth about God – that he is here and now, and he is with us in every experience of our lives. We find this emphasis not only in the teaching of our Lord, but all through the Bible.

C.S. Lewis, the popular British writer, said that when he gets to heaven and stands in the visible presence of God, he does not expect a strange face to whom he would say, "Who are you?" Instead he will see a familiar face and thinks that his response might be, "So, it was you all the time."

Mr. Lewis was very close to the biblical concept of God. The face that looks out at us from the pages of the Bible is not that of a stranger but a friend.

If I understand my Bible at all, that is what faith in God really means – not simply believing in his as the Creator of the universe, but experiencing him as a living Presence who walks with us on all the roads of life. What a tremendous it would make in our lives if we could translate our faith in God from abstract theory to personal experience.

But in all honesty, it must be said that this divine fellowship is not all sweetness and light. Jesus begins his statement with this sentence: “Whoever loves me will keep my word;” then from there he goes on to discuss the abiding presence of God.

High companionship, even on a human level, places upon us certain moral requirements. I dare say there are some here who can remember an earthly father who was loving and kind. But to say that he was loving and kind does not mean that he was soft and indulgent. To the contrary, there was something about his life that was strong and challenging. His kindness knew no bounds, but to be happy in his presence called for quality of life. Some things would not go in his fellowship.

If you had or have an earthly father like that, you are fortunate beyond measure. Many people have never known that kind of love. But we all have a heavenly Father like that.

Here is a major reason why to many of us he seems so unclear and far-removed. Great companionships, by their very nature, always carry with them a moral and ethical demand. We cannot live in the fellowship of God on cheap and easy terms, and what a tragedy it would be if we could.

Jesus said, “Whoever loves me will keep my word.” Then after that he said, “We will come to him and make our dwelling with him.” The requirement for divine companionship is not moral perfection, but it is a moral seriousness. We cannot trifle with God and share his fellowship at

the same time. The question confronting each of us today is whether we want that fellowship badly enough that we are willing to seek it with moral seriousness.

I am confident that every person here believes in God. But I wonder how many of us experience him as a daily, living Presence. That what faith in God really means – being true to his word, sharing his company, walking in his way. If you are willing to do that, then the words of the song are true: “You never walk alone; no, you never walk alone.”
Amen.