

I will not leave you comfortless. – John 14:18.



Illustration: Isaiah the Prophet

A Devotional for the
Week of the First Sunday in Lent.

Thus spake the departing Savior to His grieving disciples. How, then, would He not leave them comfortless? – "If ye love Me; keep my commandments," He said first. He that truly believes in Jesus loves Him, and he proves his love by keeping, and holding fast to, Jesus' commandments and instructions. Such are Jesus' true disciples. To them the Lord said and says: "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever."

And who is He? "The Spirit of Truth," the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and from the Son, who through the Word of Truth divinely and mightily strengthens and comforts the hearts of Jesus' disciples, and always directs to Jesus. This Comforter the unbelieving world cannot receive, because they see Him not, neither do they know Him; they are incapable of comprehending His comfort; His Word of Truth, the burden of which is Christ, is altogether foreign to them. But Jesus' disciples know this Comforter. It is He who – through His Word – brought them to Jesus in faith. And He will abide with them, and be in them, and comfort them, and divinely and mightily strengthen and comfort them, and always direct them to Jesus. It is in this manner that Jesus would not leave them comfortless. Thus He will come to them through the Holy Spirit, and the comfort that the Spirit gives.

"Yet a little while," said He to His disciples, "and the world seeth Me no more; but ye see Me," in the comforting light of the Holy Spirit. "Because I live, ye shall live also," in the life of the comfort of faith, which the Holy Spirit worketh in you. "At that day ye shall know that I am in the Father, and ye in Me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me," and is my true disciple. "And he that loveth Me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and I will manifest Myself to him," through the Holy Spirit, unto great comfort. Are the disciples of Jesus comfortless? No, "I will not leave you comfortless," says Jesus. Meditate on this blessed truth. (John 14:15-21.)

PRAYER. – Lord Jesus, who through cross and death and resurrection and ascension did enter into the glory of Your Father, and are no longer visible with Your disciples and Christians on earth, I thank You that, nevertheless, You did not leave us comfortless, but come to us through Your Word and the enlightenment of Your Holy Spirit, and reveal Yourself to us, and abundantly comfort us with Your nearness, though unseen, and with Your great love. Bestow this great comfort upon me too, O Lord, richly and daily, that I may rejoice in Your love, and exultantly finish the course leading to the mansions of the Father. Amen.

Hymn 248, 3.

Jesus, who for my salvation
To the Father didst ascend,
Hear my earnest supplication.
Unto me Thy Spirit send:
Let the Comforter for aye
Bide with me, my strength and stay,
That in faith I may not waver,
Steadfast in the truth forever.

MONDAY.

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.

– *John 14:27.*

In that night Judas, not Iscariot, said to Jesus: "Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us and not unto the world? "That was a question showing great want of wisdom. For Jesus reveals Himself and the fullness of His grace through His Word, and not otherwise. Now His disciples, who love Him, hold fast to that Word as to their greatest treasure. And the Father loves them, and comes to them with the Savior, and most graciously and lovingly makes His abode with them ; and they realize evermore what a treasure their Savior is to them. But a man of the world, who does not

love the Savior, neither holds fast to His Word, but despises it. And Jesus' Word is not the word of mortal man, but the Word of the Father who sent Him. How, then, should Jesus manifest Himself to a man of the world? This His Word the Lord had revealed to His disciples while He was still present with them. Now came the hour of parting. " But," said He, "the Comforter, even the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

Thus in us Christians also, who adhere to the written Word of Jesus, the Holy Spirit works the true, inner, heartfelt understanding of this Word, and thereby reveals to us evermore the fullness of Jesus' saving grace. And then we have peace, precious, eternal peace, that does not perish like the things of this world. Jesus says: "Peace I leave unto you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John 14:22-27.)

O Christian, disciple of Jesus, hold to Jesus' Word! Meditate on it daily. Then the divine majesty will dwell with you in love and grace; the Holy Spirit - who is ever present in the Word of Jesus - will reveal the great salvation wrought by your Savior even more clearly to you; and you shall have peace, eternal peace, peace amid the strife of this time, peace in the blessed rest of heaven.

PRAYER. – Lord Jesus, grant through Your almighty power that I, a poor sinner, may unceasingly hold to Your saving Word. God, Father, love me for Jesus' sake! Lord Jesus, come with Your Father and the Holy Spirit, and make Your abode with me! God, Holy Ghost, glorify Jesus' gracious and sure Word within my heart, that I may have peace henceforth forevermore! Amen.

Hymn 253, 1-3.

GRACIOUS Spirit, Dove divine! | Let Thy light within me shine;
All my guilty fears remove, | Fill me with Thy heavenly love.

Speak Thy pardoning grace to me, | Set the burdened sinner free;
Lead me to the Lamb of God, | Wash me in His precious blood.

Life and peace to me impart; | Seal salvation on my heart;
Dwell Thyself within my breast, | Earnest of eternal rest.

TUESDAY.

Abide in me. – John 15:4.

Jesus is the true Vine; God the Father is the Husbandman [Vine-dresser]; the believers, the Christians, are the branches. Every branch in Jesus that bears no fruit – that ceases to live and to walk in faith – God shall take away from Jesus. But every branch that bears fruit God will purge that it may bring forth more fruit.

Dear Christian, now you are clean through the Word of Jesus which you have held in faith. Thereby you have been united with Jesus as a branch with the vine, and you have the salvation which is in Jesus, His righteousness, His life, and His strength. *But abide in Jesus*, that Jesus and His salvation may abide in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, so you can not bear fruit unless you abide in Jesus through faith in His Word. Jesus is the Vine, you are the branch. You can and will bring forth much fruit only if you abide in Him and He in you. For without Him, of yourself, you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in Jesus is cast forth as a branch and is withered. And the withered branches are gathered and cast into the fire and must burn. If, however, you abide in Jesus, if His Word abides with you, all that you ask and desire will be given to you – all good gifts, all power from on high. For when you bear much fruit and are a true disciple of Jesus, the Father is glorified. Listen! As the Father has loved the Son, so has Jesus Christ, your Savior, loved you. Continue in this His love! Listen! If you keep, and hold fast to His Word and His commandments, you will abide in His love, even as He kept His Father's commandments and abode in His Father's love. Bear this in mind as a word spoken to you by – Jesus. These things He says to you in order that His joy

might remain in you, and that your joy might be full and never end. Thus Jesus spoke to His disciples in that night. Thus He also speaks to you. (John 15:1-11)

PRAYER. – O Father in heaven, great heavenly Vine-dresser, I thank You that, through Your Word and the Holy Spirit, You have ingrafted me in Your Son Jesus Christ, and have made me a partaker of the entire salvation wrought by Him. O merciful God, graciously grant that I may always embrace my Savior in His Word and abide in Him, thus being His true disciple and bringing forth fruit right for faith – that I may continue in my Savior's love, and that He may rejoice in me, and that my joy may be full eternally. Amen.

Hymn 21, 7.

Thou art the Vine, – O nourish | The branches graft in Thee,
And let them grow and flourish | A fair and fruitful tree;
Thy Spirit pour within us, | And let His gifts of grace
To all good actions win us, | That best may show Thy praise.

WEDNESDAY.

These things I command you, that ye love one another.

– *John 15:17.*

The first fruit of a godly life which Christians, as branches ingrafted in Christ, must bring forth is mutual love. In that hour of parting Jesus said to His disciples: "This is my commandment that ye love one another, as I have loved you." The love of Christ toward His own must move us to love one another. Ought we not to love those whom Jesus loves? And how has He loved His own! He says: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." He loved them unto death. He calls His own His "friends." And He says to His disciples, and He says to us: "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you," if ye love one another. Should not this constrain us to do so? And to us, His disciples,

He says: "Henceforth I call you no longer servants; for a servant knoweth not what his lord doeth." A servant must obey implicitly, without knowing his master's motives, without being taken into his confidence. "But I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."

Through His Word He has made known unto us the whole counsel of God for our salvation. Indeed, we, His own, are His friends. And He has made us His own, not we ourselves. He says: "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and commanded you that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it you." It is naught but His grace. Even as He laid down His life for us for our salvation, so also – without our seeking – He has chosen and made us His own, His branches, and has given us power to bring forth fruit, abundant fruit. And for such grace we may ask the Father in His name at all times, and He will give it. Thus we must and can bring forth the fruit of loving one another. "These things I command you, that ye love one another," says our dear Lord. (John 15:12-17.)

PRAYER. – Lord God, dear Heavenly Father, bestow on me, a poor sinner, I implore You, the power to love my brethren. Consider, I pray You, that Your dear Son has chosen me by grace and has made me His own, and has given me the power of His life, so that I can begin to do what pleases Him; and He calls me His friend. And it is His will that I should love my brethren, whom He loves even as He loves me. O Heavenly Father, I pray You, in the name of Jesus and at His command, that You would give me the power of Your Spirit to do my Savior's will. I long for such grace, and You will not deny it to me. Amen.

Hymn 67, 5.

When thus my heart in prayer ascendeth
Through Thine own Holy Spirit unto Thee,
Thy heart, O Father, kindly bendeth
Its fervent love and favor unto me,

Rejoicing my petition to fulfill
Which I have made according to Thy will.

THURSDAY.

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. – John 15:18.

The disciples of Jesus enjoy the love which loves Jesus, and must endure the hate which hates Him: they are loved by their fellow-disciples and hated by the unbelieving world. In the latter instance they must note the word of Jesus: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you."

If we disciples of Jesus still were of the world, the world would love us as its own; but because we are not of the world, but our Lord has chosen us out of the world and has made us His disciples, therefore the world hates us, for it hates Jesus. We must remember the word that Jesus said to His disciples on a former occasion: "The servant is not greater than his lord." If they have persecuted Jesus, they will also persecute us; and in the same way in which they accepted His Word, just so will they accept ours also, namely, they will not accept it, for it is the same Word. Just for the sake of the name and Word of Jesus the world hates us; for it is their own fault that they do not know God who sent Jesus. True, if the world, which in its unbelief hates Jesus, had not heard His Word, this guilt would not rest upon it, but now it has no excuse for its sin. What sin? The sin of hating Jesus and His Word. He that hates Jesus hates God the Father, who manifests Himself in Jesus.

Thus the prophecy of the Son of God is fulfilled: "They hated Me without cause," Ps. 69, 4. Who is it that really testifies of Jesus? It is the Comforter, whom Jesus has sent us from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth that proceed from the Father. And we Christians also bear witness of Jesus from the Word which the Holy Spirit has written through the Apostles. And what results? The true witnesses of Jesus are cast out by the unbelieving world, even by that part which decks itself with Jesus' name and calls itself the Church of God.

Indeed, there have been times, and they may return, that whosoever kills the witnesses of Jesus thinks that he does God a service. Let no disciple of Jesus be offended thereat. Jesus has foretold it; we must bear it in mind. The unbelieving world, both in secular and spiritual garb, knows not, nor does it want to know, either the Father or our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Therefore it hates the disciples and witnesses of Jesus. The hatred which the world bears us because of Jesus' name is testimony to the fact that we belong to Jesus, and that His Spirit rests upon us. (John 15:18 - 16:4.)

PRAYER. – O Lord, almighty Son of God, who cares for Your children with a loving father's care, and knows beforehand all things that will befall Your Church, and the faithful witnesses of the Truth in particular, we give thanks to You that You do forewarn us of this and insure us against offense. I pray You graciously to grant the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to me too, that I may fearlessly confess Your truth, suffer gladly for its sake, remain true to You and Your Word, and both in success and adversity praise and magnify You. Amen.

Hymn 273, 4.

The Word they still shall let remain,
And not a thank have for it:
He's by our side upon the plain
With His good gifts and Spirit.
And take they our life | Goods, fame, child, and wife:
Let these all be gone, | They yet have nothing won;
The kingdom ours remaineth.

FRIDAY.

He will reprove the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. – John 16:8.

Thus the Lord spoke to His disciples in the night in which He was betrayed: "But now I go my way to Him that sent Me; and none

of you asketh Me. Whither goest Thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you."

By His going to the Father, by atoning for our sins with His precious suffering and death, our Redeemer has brought it about that the Holy Ghost comes to us and most kindly comforts us with the only, yes, the eternal comfort of God, which is Christ, and makes us bold and confident against all the enmity of the world. – But even with this malignant world, which hates and rejects Christ and His witnesses, the Holy Spirit desires to accomplish something through our testimony. What? He wants to reprove the world. What does that mean? He wishes to convince it against its will – of what? Of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. How so of sin? Through our testimony of Christ the Holy Spirit thrusts this prick into the hearts of unbelievers: If we do not believe in Christ, we remain under the curse of sin. And of righteousness?

Thus: By rejecting Christ, who through His death and resurrection and ascension went to the Father, we reject the only righteousness thus procured for us, and wherein we can stand before God. And, lastly, of judgment? Thus: We who reject Christ, serve the prince of this world; but he and all his followers and all his pomp are judged and damned. On the day of judgment, when God shall bring to light the counsels of the hearts, it will become manifest that – by our testimony of Christ – this threefold prick has been thrust into the hearts of deniers, and that with malice aforethought they kicked against this prick. Thus does the Holy Ghost give us the power of God, and make our testimony divinely effectual. So let us, each on his part, bear firm, undaunted, strong witness of Jesus.

(John 16:5-11.)

PRAYER. – God, Holy Ghost, grant me, I implore You, courage and strength to be a true witness of the only Savior of sinners, Jesus Christ. Grant me grace to bring many to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. But thrust a sword into the hearts of malicious deniers that they may become aware of the fact that they are rejecting

their salvation, the only salvation of their souls. Let Your almighty Word be effectual, for You truly are He who testifies of Christ on earth. Amen.

Hymn 247, 5.

Thy heavenly strength sustain our heart
That we may act the valiant part | With Thee as our reliance;
Be Thou our refuge and our shield,
That we may never quit the field, | Bidding all foes defiance.
Descend, Defend, | From all errors And earth's terrors:
Thy salvation | Be our constant consolation.

SATURDAY.

He will guide you into all truth. – John 16:13.

In the three years that He was with His disciples, Jesus had declared unto them the whole truth, and told them all things which they had to know for their own and all mankind's salvation. Nothing was wanting. But where was it all now? Fear and sadness covered it all as with a dense veil. This veil the Savior sought to lift in that night with many kind words. But now the time was too short. A spiritual numbness had come over the disciples. Therefore He said: " I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth." Into the whole truth which the Savior had already told them, the Holy Spirit would guide them, and make it an inward possession - light, bright, and clear unto faith's divine comprehension.

Not "of Himself " would He speak, no new things would He teach, but only those things which He would hear in the eternal and ever-present counsel of God, and which the Savior had already revealed unto them. He would also show them those things to come in time and eternity which the Savior had already foretold them. He was to glorify Jesus alone; for He was to testify of Jesus only, and what He had done for us. All the things that the Father has, His divine being as well as His saving counsel and compassion and operation and work, all, all is Jesus' own, and is in Jesus, and has appeared in Jesus,

and is to be found in Jesus. Therefore the Lord said to His disciples: "He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you."

(John 16:12-15.)

Note this, Christian! For this is said to you, too. Make diligent use of the Word of Jesus. There all things are revealed that are able to save you. By means of this Word the Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth, and glorify Jesus, yes, Jesus, in you.

PRAYER. – Lord Jesus, my Savior, my entire salvation, grant me, too, Your Holy Spirit that He may rid me of my faint-heartedness and the numbness of my heart, and so enlighten me with His divine light, that I may behold the whole saving truth of Your Word with the clear eye of faith. You, O Jesus, are the saving Truth. Glorify Yourself within my heart through Your Word and the Holy Spirit, that I may know You rightly, firmly believe in You, and cheerfully and confidently wait for the things to come; for there I see no gloom, but only blessed light. Amen.

Hymn 9, 3.

Abide with heavenly brightness | Among us, precious Light;
Thy truth direct, and keep us | From error's gloomy night.

These devotions are adapted from *Crumbs* by C. M. Zorn (1914).
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