

Did you catch the wafting smell of roasting meat in one of our readings this morning? I guess I'm hungry, and I'm craving a Trinity Church picnic so I picked that up right away.

Last year at about this time, it seems like centuries ago, we gathered for hot dogs and hamburgers outside of Walker Hall. The Trinity Glen men barbecued for us and we brought salads and desserts. Sigh. How long will it be before we get to do that again? And don't you think that when we **do** gather for a BBQ that we won't EVER take it for granted again that we can sit with each other, eat great food, talk and laugh and share stories.

It will happen. We just need more patience. I need more patience. It's our psalm today that mentions offering the sacrifice of animals in thanksgiving for coming through a crisis. *"I will offer you sacrifices of fat beasts with the smoke of rams; I will give you oxen and goats."* Ps. 66:13

This psalm is one of thanksgiving for God who saves us when enemies are riding over us, when heavy burdens are laid on our backs, and when we must go through fire and water. This all reminds us once again that in every age and in every civilization there are times of great difficulties, and also times of great gratitude for blessings given.

The psalmist says. *"But you brought us out into a place of refreshment,"* Ps. 66:11b

This is not to say that we are **through** this COVID 19 crisis and out the other side. Far from it. We all still know people who are sick, people who are suffering from job loss, and we don't even know how long this will all last. And yet we can still be grateful.

Every day when I speak to people on the phone or on a video chat, we commiserate about the trials and tribulations of life as it is now, AND we share our gratitude for small blessings. We recognize those gifts as perhaps we've never done before; the beauty of spring and the reawakening of our natural life, the ability to get out for a walk, or plant a flower or tomato plant, or even to be able to find a much needed item at the grocery store. Small blessings. There is so much we have taken for granted in the past.

So, the psalmist reminds us to offer our thanksgiving to God for the blessings and love that have been given us. In the Book of Leviticus the ancient Hebrew laws were laid out determining what would be given in a service of thanksgiving. Cakes of flour and oil roasted over a fire, and fat young animals roasted and then shared among the people and the priests. These days we call that Thanksgiving Day. But we sure need more than one day a year to be thankful, especially now.

Turning to our Gospel reading, the feast of the Holy Spirit, Pentecost, is still a couple of weeks away, and yet our Gospel reading today addresses the coming of the Spirit which Jesus calls here the Advocate (or Paraclete in Greek.)

And so our thoughts turn to the third person of the Trinity, who has been called “The shy member of the Holy Trinity.” Jesus says to the disciples in our portion of John’s gospel today, *“I will not leave you orphaned.”* The feast of the Ascension takes place this week on May 21st. Episcopalians don’t usually gather to celebrate the Ascension. But it’s with that feast day in mind that we begin to leave the post-resurrection passages of the Gospels and address the absence of Jesus.

Jesus tells the disciples, and us, that he lives and because he lives, we also live. *“I will send you another Advocate to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth.” John 14:16b*

Now, an advocate is a guide, a companion, one who supports and defends, a person who helps us in times of difficulty. Unseen, and untouchable though, how can we understand God as Advocate?

I remember a few years ago a good friend of mine’s husband had to go into a hospital for surgery in a foreign country. And there were some complications. He was in a lot of pain, but the pain meds he was given made him very sick. He was unable to keep food down and he was very weak. His wife sprang into action on his behalf and spoke to the doctors and nurses and communicated in the language of that country what her husband was unable to say.

And she got results. She also lobbied, successfully, to be able to stay in the room with him at night in a folding bed. The husband began to improve rapidly after that, and is doing just fine now. Once out the other side of the experience, the man recognized the amazing presence that his wife had been to him in that time. He could not advocate for himself, and **she was a terrier** – never letting up until her husband received the care he needed. Now that’s the epitome of a human advocate!

So, imagine yourself in the hospital (God forbid, but it’s a very real worry these days.) Imagine that you are alone there and perhaps unable to speak. At this time, of course, no family members are allowed in the hospitals. And the doctors and nurses here in OUR country are certainly attentive and caring. But what a calming and comforting presence an advocate could be for you. That one is God’s Spirit, the Paraclete. All we have to do is turn and ask for the presence of this **Terrier who is God**.

So, no matter where you are, or what you are going through, we have a powerful advocate whom we can call on at any time, day or night, who will listen to us, who will care for our bodies and souls, who will save us and help us. We are not alone if we can just remember to call on the Advocate who stands ready to wipe our brow and lead us in the path of peace.

And again, from this morning’s psalm: *“In truth God has heard me, he has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer, nor withheld his love from me.” Psalm 66:17-18.*