

## John 14:15-21<sup>v vi</sup>

Jesus said to the disciples: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

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### <sup>v</sup> About the Gospel: John 14:15-21

Today's reading contains Jesus' repeated assurances that his death will not leave his disciples "orphaned." Jesus promises an indwelling presence to those who keep his commandments. That presence is described in three ways. First, the Father will send "another Advocate" (v. 15), who will remain with believers. The word "Advocate" (Greek, *paracletos*) may also be translated Counselor or Helper. Second, Jesus himself will come, visibly after the resurrection, invisibly in the Christian community and finally at the second coming. Third, Jesus and the Father are in union and they will dwell with those who love Jesus and obey him (v. 23).

John does not particularly distinguish among these three kinds of presence. As these verses show, the presence of Jesus after his return to the Father is accomplished in and through the Advocate.

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## vi Reflection and Response

“Since we are God’s offspring,” says St. Paul, “we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone...” (Acts 17:29a). He speaks to people who worship an unknown god in a marble shrine. When Paul questions their religious assumptions, they might logically ask, “Then what is the deity like?”

Sometimes we seem as ignorant of the nature of God as the Athenians. We may think of God as wearing a stony face, dispensing rigid justice. To us, God may be the stern parent who takes a perverse joy in punishing us. Pleasing such a God makes virtue a grim duty and faith a joyless drudgery. Today’s gospel corrects those punitive images of God.

Jesus’ parable of the vine in John 15 reveals a God who is pliant, supple and fruitful. God does not stand poised to pounce on every misstep, but responds generously to our needs, encouraging us to risk and create. Jesus’ promise of “another Advocate” in John 14 reveals a God intimately involved in daily hopes and challenges, one who understands our struggles and wants to comfort, strengthen and guide us. Can we believe that God does not delight in our loneliness or paralysis, but wants us to be joyous, creative and free?

Perhaps that is what Paul was trying to tell the Athenians. Our God is found not in lifeless silver and gold; God is beyond the “art and imagination of mortals” (v. 29). In God we “have our being” (v. 28). How do we respond? Abraham Heschel answers in the tone of the psalmist: “The way to prayer leads through acts of wonder and radical amazement. Aflame with inability to say what God’s presence means, we can only sing, we can only utter words of adoration.”