An excerpt from "Breaking the Word: Homiletics," *Emmanuel* 119:3 (2013) 261-281 by Raymond F. Collins.

Last November 13, after a 227-11-4 vote, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops made a timely statement. They issued a document entitled "Preaching the Mystery of Faith: The Sunday Homily." This was the bishops' first document on preaching since they had published "Fulfilled in Your Hearing" thirty years previously. The recent document deserves a reading by every homilist but it has been widely neglected.

Among other things, the bishops noted that new circumstances and the needs of our times call for further reflection on the Sunday homily. They pointed to many such circumstances including the individualism of our society, the sexual abuse crisis, the widening economic gap between the rich and the poor, consumerism, racism, and the alienation of so many people from the faith.

Much of the exhortation rehearses familiar ground but the bishops observe, correctly, that the Sunday liturgy remains the basic setting in which most adult Catholics encounter Christ and their Christian faith. They also noted that many of these Catholics are not well educated in matters of faith.

Accordingly, following the lead of Benedict XVI in his post-synodal apostolioc exhortations, *"Sacrosanctum caritatis*" (2007) and "Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church (2010), the bishops say that, "the catechetical aim of the homily should not be neglected." An effective homily, they note, takes its cue from the very nature of the Scriptures, but its teaching function is not to be neglected. The homily is neither an exegesis of the Scriptures nor a dogmatic exposition, but preaching the Word should nonetheless be "doctrinal and catechetical."

In my own preaching, I always try to teach something and allow the congregation to deepen their understanding of the faith. How gratified I am, when a well-educated Catholic recently said to me, "I always learn something in your homilies."

As I was developing my reflections on this spring's gospel lections, I was struck by the way in which the first readings give us ample opportunity for catechesis on the Holy Spirit. Jesus' prayer for the unity of his disciples was a stark reminder of how much ecumenism has become "a blast from the past." In the context of the political discussions on abortion and gun control, I could but think of Jesus' own pro-life stance. And as so many women are searching for a model of faith, why do so many of us relegate Mary Magdalene to the status of a village whore, which she was not?

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
May 5, 2013

LITURGY
Acts 15:1-2, 22-29 includes the letter from the "Council of Jerusalem" (cf. Acts 15:19-20).
Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23 presents the seer's vision of the new Jerusalem in which the temple has been replaced by the lamb and the glory of God took the place of the normal sources of illumination.
John 14:23-29 begins with a two-part instruction on the love of Jesus (vv. 23-24). A disciple's love for Jesus is manifest in the disciple's keeping God's word. The consequence of that love is that the disciple will be loved by the Father; Jesus and the Father will come to that person and abide definitively with him or her. The expression of this consequence is part of the Fourth

Gospel's end-time eschatology. It looks beyond the "already but not yet" of the present to the permanent Spirit-enabled presence of the Father and Son with the believer in the future.

The negative side of this is that the one who does not love Jesus will not keep Jesus' words. Since the words of Jesus are ultimately the words of the Father, the one who rejects Jesus' words rejects the Father who sent him (cf. John 4:34; 5:23; etc.). Left unsaid is the consequence of the rejection of the Father. That consequence could be omitted because the departing Jesus' paraenetic intent required only that his hearers begin to think seriously about what it means to reject Jesus' words.

After this two-part instruction on the love of Jesus come two promises. The first promise (vv. 25-26) is that, because of Jesus, the Father will send the Advocate (*parakletos*, see my comments on the gospel for Pentecost later in this essay) to the disciples. His role will be to enable the disciples to understand and remember what Jesus had taught. Their misunderstanding—a major Johannine theme!—will be a thing of the past.

The second promise is the gift of peace (v. 27a). Associated with the gift of the Spirit-Advocate, this peace is of a sort that the world cannot give. It is the *shalom* given by the Messiah (cf. Isa 9:6-7; 52:7; 57:19); it cannot be produced by the world and its denizens. It is gift, not the product of human endeavor. As the greatest of covenant blessings, this peace is tantamount to the total well-being of those to whom it is given.

The reading concludes with Jesus' words of consolation (vv. 27b-29). He encourages the disciples not to be worried because he is going away (cf. John 14:1a). They should be prepared for his inevitable departure. They should rejoice because Jesus is going to the Father; they should be consoled by what Jesus has told them. He has given them the gift of his messianic peace; the Father will give them the gift of the Spirit-Advocate. They have been prepared and so should deal with Jesus' departure with faith.

BROKEN FOR US

First to be noted is that the gift of peace is a gift given to Jesus' disciples, as the liturgical *incipit* to the reading implies. The liturgical introduction to the kiss of peace too readily suggests that peace is given to "the apostles," a group which does not appear as such in the Fourth Gospel. As a matter of fact the word "apostle" is not used in the Gospel according to John.

Also to be noted is that John 14-23b, is part of the optional gospel reading for the Feast of Pentecost in Year C.

The homily should concentrate on either the first or the second part of the reading, not both. Certainly the notion that love of Jesus, with its eschatological consequences, is expressed in keeping his word, his commandment can be fruitfully developed for the benefit of the congregation. In summary, it is that love of Jesus is manifest in our love of one another. And yet so often during the months leading up to last year's presidential election did I hear words of real hatred come from the lips of believers, even by some who attended daily Mass!

Concentration on the second part of the reading should lead the congregation to be grateful for the farewell gifts of the departing Jesus, the gift of peace and his promise that the Spirit-Advocate will be given by the Father.

THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD
Thursday, May 9, 2013 or Sunday, May 12, 2013

An excerpt from "Breaking the Word: Homiletics," *Emmanuel* 119:3 (2013) 261-281 by Raymond F. Collins.

LITURGY

Acts 1:1-11 is the Lukan account of Jesus' ascension into heaven.

Ephesians 1:17-23 contains a prayer that believers be enriched with the gifts of the exalted Lord Jesus Christ. **Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:19-23**, the alternative reading, contains the beautiful image of Christ entering the heavenly sanctuary and speaks of our hope to enter this same sanctuary because of what Christ has done.

Luke 24:46-53 is the conclusion to the Gospel according to Luke which, the evangelist says, is a narrative that contains "all that Jesus did and taught" (Acts 1:1).

The first part of the reading is the finale of Jesus last after-dinner speech to his disciples (Luke 24:44-49). Since after-dinner speeches are used in Hellenistic literature as a literary device to convey teaching, Jesus' after-dinner speeches are an important feature of Luke's narrative (see my "The Man Who Came to Dinner," in R. Bieringer, G. Van Belle, and J. Verheyden., eds., *Luke and His Readers* [BETL 182. Leuven: University Press - Peeters, 2004], 151-172). Jesus' first public speech used the scripture to outline his public ministry (Luke 4:11-22). His ministry was in fulfillment of the scriptures. His last speech focuses on his death and resurrection as the fulfillment of scripture. Everything that Jesus did and said was *kata tas graphas*, in accordance with the scripture.

Thereafter, Jesus speaks about the mission of his disciples. They are to preach repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, in the name of Jesus to all nations beginning from Jerusalem. Emphasis on Jerusalem is an important feature of the Lukan narrative. The story begins with Zechariah in the temple of Jerusalem (Luke 1:5-23). As the narrative approaches its climax, Jesus spoke with Moses and Elijah about Jesus departure which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). It concludes with Jesus' giving his final teaching and instructions in Jerusalem, before departing for Bethany, a near-by suburb (Luke 24:50). After Jesus was carried up and away from the disciples, they returned to Jerusalem and its temple where they blessed and praised God. Their return to Jerusalem is a sign of their obedience to Jesus. With that the Lukan narrative has come full circle. It began in the temple of Jerusalem and ends in the temple of Jerusalem.

The disciples' joy (*chara*) is an experience of Messianic peace and exaltation (cf. Luke 1:4; 2:10; 8:13; 10:17; 15:7, 10). They are able to fulfill the mission that Jesus has entrusted to them because they, with an emphatic *hymeis* ("you") in the Greek text, were eyewitnesses (*martyres*) to "these things" (*touton*), especially the death and resurrection of the Messiah. For Luke, being an eyewitness is an important element of credible proclamation (cf. Luke 1:2; Acts 1:22). Moreover, the promise of the Father, the gift of the Spirit, will enable the apostles to preach in Jesus' name, in accordance with the instruction that they have been given. In Acts 1:8, the evangelist recapitulates the mission of the apostles, using many of the same themes found in today's gospel reading.

BROKEN FOR US

The reading of today's gospel is an important reminder that the Feast of the Ascension is not so much a reminder of Jesus' absence as it is a celebration of presence. With Jesus' ascension into heaven comes the mission of the apostles, to which we are all heirs. With Jesus' Ascension come the promise of the Spirit and the Spirit's manifold gifts.

An excerpt from "Breaking the Word: Homiletics," *Emmanuel* 119:3 (2013) 261-281 by Raymond F. Collins.

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
May 12, 2013

LITURGY
Acts 7:55-60 describes the death of Stephen, often considered the first Christian martyr.
Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20 is taken from the conclusion of the Book of Revelation
John 17:20-26 forms the conclusion to the high priestly prayer of John 17 and is readily divided into two units.

The introduction to the first unit (vv. 20-23) makes it clear that Jesus is praying not only for the disciples who were with him at the time but also for the disciples of those disciples, continuing on to the present time. The leitmotif of the first unit—repeated in verses 21, 22, and 23—is a prayer for the unity of Jesus' disciples. This unity is rooted in the unity between the Son and the Father. Such unity shall lead outsiders, the "world," to recognize that Jesus has been sent by the Father and is loved by the Father. The goal of Christian unity is that the world recognize the relationship between Jesus and the Father. The unity of Christians is not an end in itself; it is a sign of the unity of the Father and the Son.

In the second unit of today's reading, the final unit of Jesus' Johannine prayer, Jesus prays for what he wants for the disciples—presumably including later generations of disciples as well—that they experience Jesus' transformative glory, the glory with which Jesus has been endowed by the Father from all eternity. This is another expression of Johannine end-time eschatology (cf. John 14:23 in last Sunday's gospel reading). This prayer is the ground for Christian hope. We can be confident that we will experience the glory of Jesus because that has been the burden of Jesus' prayer to the Father.

Addressing the Father as the "Righteous Father," Jesus recalls his earlier address to the Father as "Holy Father" (John 17:11). Jesus prays for the success of the disciples' mission in the world. From Jesus they learned that he had been sent from the Father. Jesus revealed that saving reality to them. Now the disciples are to be Jesus' instruments in the communication of that revelation. Through them God, not in himself but in his manifestation ("his name"), will be revealed, just as He had been revealed by Jesus. The love of the Father and Jesus will abide in his disciples, those disciples who fulfill the mission that has been entrusted to them.

BROKEN FOR US

We are now celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. Soon after the Council and because of its teaching, a hopeful wave of ecumenism spread throughout the church. Prayers for Christian unity were said. The Week of Prayer for Christian unity was a major event in the life of the Church. Ecumenical cooperation was the order of the day.

So much of that has now passed. We rarely hear of the ecumenical movement. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is often reduced to a single petition in the previous Sunday's general intercessions. This has been accompanied by amnesia with regard to Jesus' prayer that all his disciples may be one.

We should make Jesus' prayer our own prayer. We should pray for the unity of Jesus' disciples, the unity of the churches that profess his name. What is at stake is at stake is the revelation of the Father's love to the world. And is there anything more urgent than that the world recognizes the Father's love and allows that love to abide in the world?

PENTECOST SUNDAY

An excerpt from "Breaking the Word: Homiletics," *Emmanuel* 119:3 (2013) 261-281 by Raymond F. Collins.

May 19, 2013

LITURGY

Acts 2:1-11 contains Luke's account of the Pentecost experience, the descent of the Spirit on the 120 believers who had gathered in Jerusalem shortly after Jesus' ascension into heaven.
1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13 speaks of the different gifts of the Spirit and of the Spirit-facilitated unity-in-diversity of the body of Christ. **Romans 8:8-17**, the alternate reading, is a passage in which Paul writes about the indwelling of the Spirit in those who believe in Jesus.
John 20:19-23, the Johannine account of the gift of the Spirit, is a reading which can be used on any of the three celebrations of the Feast of Pentecost in the triennial cycle of liturgical readings, Years A, B, and C. My exegetical reflections on the pericope can be found in *Emmanuel* 117 (2011) 261-281.
John 14:15-16, 23b-26, the alternate reading for Year C, combines two short segments of the Fourth Gospel's farewell discourse. The first segment of the liturgical lection introduces the theme of loving Jesus and keeping his commandments. The idea that keeping the commandments follows from one's love of Jesus (v. 15) links this first segment of the reading to the second segment which rehearses the motif three times (vv. 21, 23, 24).

The thought of Jesus' imminent departure provides the background for today's reading. As he is about to return to the Father, Jesus promises to ask the Father to send another Advocate (*parakletos*) in his stead. This Advocate is to remain with the disciples always.

There is a flood of literature which attempts to probe the meaning of *Parakletos.* The term is a noun associated with the Greek verb *parakalein*, meaning "to call to one's side." To do what is the question. Often the term has the connotation of legal counsel, someone on the side of the defense, an advocate in a court of law or before civic officials. This connotation may well have been predominate at the time that the Fourth Gospel was written, when Christians were beginning to be "on trial," not only before Jewish authorities but also before representatives of the Roman Empire.

In a footnote the New Revised Standard Version offers "Helper" as an alternative translation. Often the verb is used to mean "console;" if this is the nuance intended by the evangelist, "Consoler" or "Comforter" would come close to rendering adequately the Greek *parakletos.* But the Advocate does much more than merely console. He enables the disciples to remember what Jesus taught and strengthens them when they are afflicted. The Advocate is teacher, guide, and source of strength. Because of the ambiguity and multivalence of the term, many commentators and some translations render the Greek *parakletos* with a transliteration: Jesus promises that he will send the Paraclete.

Only in the second segment (v. 25) of today's gospel reading is the Advocate/Paraclete identified as the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. This second segment was read as part of the gospel lection for the Fifth Sunday of Easter, May 5. It speaks of the love of Jesus and the promise of the Advocate-Spirit. See the commentary above.

BROKEN FOR US

An excerpt from "Breaking the Word: Homiletics," *Emmanuel* 119:3 (2013) 261-281 by Raymond F. Collins.

In order to break open the word of the Scriptures more fully open for the faithful, as we are encouraged to do by the Second Vatican Council, I would encourage the homilist to devote his or her attention to the option for Year C, John 14:15-16, 23b-26.

It might behoove the preacher to grapple with the meaning of *Parakletos*, not to offer a lesson in semantics but to capitalize on the ambiguity of the term to speak about the manifold richness of the gift of the Spirit, the various roles of the Spirit in the life of the Church and the life of the believing disciples. The Spirit is our guide and consoler, our teacher and our support. The teacher inspires the Church, particularly when its leaders are gathered in ecumenical council. In a word, the Spirit is another Advocate, because he is the modality of God's dwelling within ourselves and the community of believers.

THE MOST HOLY TRINITY
May 26, 2013

LITURGY
Proverbs 8:22-31proclaims personified Wisdom, Sophia, as being with God from the beginning of time.
Romans 5:1-5 is a passage in which Paul says that we have peace with God through Jesus Christ and that the love of God—God's love for us—has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.
John 16:12-15 is yet another passage from the Farewell Discourses in the Fourth Gospel that speaks about the coming of the Spirit. This relatively short reading emphasizes the role of the Spirit in continuing the revelatory mission of Jesus.

It begins with Jesus' affirmation that he has more to say, more teaching to give or perhaps a depth of the teaching that he has already given that he would like to communicate to the disciples but they were not ready for it. Their human weakness comes into play, making them incapable of receiving the fullness of revelation during Jesus' time with them. That time is on the verge of coming to an end.

After Jesus' departure, the Spirit of truth (cf. John 14:17) will come to the disciples. The Spirit of truth—an expression also found in the Qumran literature—is the Spirit who communicates truth. The Spirit is the presence of the revelation of God in the world. His mission will be to lead the disciples to the heart of *all* truth. The universal qualification (*pase*) of truth (*aletheia*) is not to be overlooked.

No more than Jesus spoke on his own, will the Spirit speak on his own. Both Jesus and the Spirit have been sent by the Father and will speak the words of the Father (cf. John 3:34). Like Jesus the Spirit speaks what he has heard (cf. John 3:32). Specifically the Spirit is to declare (*anangelei*) the things that are to come (*ta erchomena*). The verb "declare" is used infrequently in the Fourth Gospel; it has the nuance of speaking about the deeper meaning of things. In this case, the deeper meaning of what is to come. The "things that are to come" should not be narrowly construed as if they pertained exclusively to the eschaton; rather it pertains to whatever, until the end of time, flows from the presence of Jesus Revealer in the world.

The Spirit will enable the disciples to understand what Jesus has taught, to "remember" with deeper insight that revelation (cf. John 14:26). But Jesus and the Father are one (John 10:30, 38; cf. John 1:1-2). Everything that Jesus has is from the Father; all that the Father has,

Jesus has. He is the fullness of revelation. It is the role of the Spirit of truth to make that known to and understood by the disciples.

BROKEN FOR US

Some reputable scholars, particularly Roman Catholic scholars, find in this passage the ground for the Church's on-going interpretation of the teaching of Jesus since the time of his glorification on the cross and his departure from this world. Hence, today's homily might appropriately focus on the mission of the church to continually probe into the meaning of Jesus' teaching under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The mission belongs to the entire church, the "disciples," not simply to the hierarchy alone. Biblical scholars and theologians also participate in the Spirit-inspired mission of probing the meaning of Jesus revelation for our times, as do other members of the church in accordance with the gifts that the Spirit has given them.