

“I Will Send You an Advocate, the Holy Spirit...”

In my time in special education classrooms and as an administrator, I sat in on many IEP or Individual Educational Plan meetings. This is when the “team” would assemble to discuss the progress and continued needs of the student. When the students were old enough, they could sit in at the meeting and were to be addressed about concerns they may have with the plan.

In certain cases, the student or parents would have an Advocate with them. The Advocate was someone who was supposedly knowledgeable about the laws surrounding Special Education such as IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and FAPE (Free and Public Education for All.) While the Advocate was in the meeting, they were there for the best interest of the student and would defend the needs and rights. Other times, they would have to say to the parents that the school was following IDEA and FAPE and there wasn’t much more that could be done.

The idea of an Advocate has stuck with me ever since. The official definition of an Advocate (used as a noun) “one who defends or

maintains a cause or proposal” or “one who supports or promotes the interests of a cause or group.” In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus, before he leaves, reminds the disciples that he will not do so in terms of abandonment. He promises that God “will send an Advocate, to teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you.”

The Holy Spirit is called an Advocate, most likely in the Greek term, “Parakletos,” which translate into “helper, comforter, or someone who comes alongside to assist and defend.” We will see in the Pentecost event on June 8 how this was fulfilled in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Throughout the rest of Acts, Peter and Paul call upon the power of the Holy Spirit to be with them as they preach, write and heal in the name of Jesus. But today, Jesus is giving us a foreshadowing of what is to come.

The disciples and the early followers of The Way certainly needed an Advocate and advocacy. Almost 2000 years later, we share their need. We rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to be with us and move us into action or even move us into calmness when we need to take some time to pray and reflect. We need the Holy Spirit to come alongside to

assist and defend us as well as help us promote the reign of God on earth in Westfield, Southwick, Granville, Montgomery, and wherever we may be.

This weekend, most Americans will take some time to remember those who gave their lives in defense of our country. Unfortunately, we cannot honor any living person because it is a day to remember. It is a day to show we are grateful that they, too, served as our advocates to defend and maintain our freedom. They did not abandon their country and, in their own way, gave of themselves to preserve the right to worship freely so that we still can call upon the Advocate or Holy Spirit to be with us. This freedom to worship is extended to every person living in this country, regardless of creed, color, gender, orientation, or who they worship. This cannot be denied.

As worshiping communities in both Westfield and Southwick, we also need the guidance and support of the Holy Spirit as we discuss who we are, how we are, and where we are going in the years to come. With this in mind, both First Congregational and Southwick Congregational church members will be invited to focus groups to call upon the Holy

Spirit to be with us and to give us guidance as to what is next for us as we work together to spread the Gospel message in the “Greater Westfield” area. As these times become known to us, I shall encourage, beg, plead, and implore you to sign up and let your voice be heard. How will we know how the Spirit is moving through each one of us if we don’t share?

As we move on through this long weekend, let us take some time to invite the Holy Spirit into our lives as we seek to find the peace that Jesus offers to each of us. May this peace envelope us as we continue to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead. Peace be with you!