

“Enjoy this life!” John 14:15-21

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me.

Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

God’s message to us is unusual, and His expectations as well, as is His way of dealing with us. Today, meditating on our Gospel text we’ll try to answer three questions. First, what does God expects us to do? Second, how can we do it? Third, where does it lead us? What does God expects from us, how can we do it, and where does it lead us?

The first one, what does God expects from us? This is a tough one. When we discuss what God expects from us, we are not talking about some kind of suggestions. He has created us for particular kind of life, He commands us to life according His design and He expects that we’ll obey His commands, otherwise there will be consequences, here and in eternity.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” If you love me, you will keep me commandments. That’s pretty clear, right? The question however is, what commandments did Jesus mean?

When asked about the highest commandments Jesus summarized it this way: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mat 22:37-39)

This is what we are expected to do. There is no excuse for not living this way. But Jesus didn’t come just to remind us about God’s will for our lives. He came to restore God’s broken creation.

Especially He came to restore our relationships with the Father and among ourselves. He called His disciples, that is also us, to follow Him in doing this. And, these are not just words, these are very clear instruction for all of us.

Let's see what is meant by them. We all have many different vocations. Or we can say that we all are in many different relationships. First of all, we are God's creatures, then we are children of our parents.

We are spouses, we are parents to our children and grandparents to our grandchildren, we are siblings to our brothers and sisters, we are neighbors to our neighbors, we are employees and employers, we are members of this congregation, and so on.

In all these relationships we can see and we often experience the brokenness of this world. If we think about all your relationships, we can find how many of them are broken and damaged by sin; by what we have or haven't done, by what others have done to us, and by what others do to themselves.

The more we learn and comprehend what God's design for our lives is, the more we see the misery of our sinful world. Nothing is spared. Divisions in families, separations, violence, addictions, unquenchable thirst for success, money, sex, loss of dignity and meaning, emptiness and lack of joy, pursue of happiness where only frustration is found.

This is not to deny that we daily receive countless blessing of God. We all do. It is to admit that our world is broken in so many ways. That's how things are. What are solutions? What can and what should we do?

In some cases what you need is to hear God's forgiveness. May be even in a private confession, laying down your burden before God and hearing His forgiving voice, so that you have a good conscience and are assured that the Father accepts you, whatever you have done. Forgiven!

In some situations you may need to repent, to step over our ego, to go and ask someone else to forgive you, or sometimes you may need to make a first step and offer your forgiveness, even if other person is still unrepentant, so that you can restore relationships that are broken by sin. For God daily forgives us so that we could do the same.

In some situations you may need to talk with your loved ones, telling them the truth, warning about consequences, and asking them to repent and to return to the Lord. How many of our loved ones are far away from the only way to the Father? And sometimes we don't know what to say, how to say it, how to share what is the most important for every person, the Gospel of God's forgiveness.

In some situation you may need to share and teach and explain what God's design, God's will for our lives is. You may be surprised how many around us actually don't know for what kind of life we are created. Even we, how well we know it?

In some situations there is not much we can do, but we can pray, pray all together, that God in His wisdom would give us an opportunity to restore what is broken. This is what we are supposed to do, and it is not optional. It is our Christian duty.

How willing are we to do these things? How easy is to do them? How much easier is to pretend that we don't have any problems. But it is difficult to deceive our consciences. When we close our eyes, brokenness of this world doesn't disappear.

We try to avoid these broken relationships, for they are painful, they hurt. Sometimes there is such an injustice done to us, that it is difficult even to think about restoring relationships, about forgiveness. Sometimes we may be afraid that dealing with this brokenness can destroy what is left.

If we think about our lives just for a while, I'm sure we all will find so much that we have to do if we want to take Jesus commandments seriously. Then we realize how much effort is required from us.

To take a risk at our cost, put aside our pride, to think about others higher than about ourselves, to carry others' burdens, to forgive them not just seven, but seventy seven times. Be ready to suffer for the sake of others, not expecting any reward. The world doesn't understand it, nor promote it.

For the world the real strength is to do things your way, to make your name big, and if there is brokenness in relationships that taints your life, get rid of them, leave them behind. Think, first, about yourself! And so often we do so.

Here we come to our second question. How can we do what Jesus expects us to do? Will it suffice to discuss it, and then we'll go and do it? We'll restore the brokenness at least in all our relationships, and will help our loved ones to fix their lives. It's not that easy. I know it, and you know it.

What is the most important, Jesus knows it. That's why He said these comforting and encouraging words. "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth [...] You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."

This is so good to realize that, yes, Jesus puts all these demands on us. Yes, God expects us to keep them, and, yes, He also knows what kind of creatures we are. Fallen. Weak. Broken. As apostle Paul put it:

"For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good, I want, but the evil, I do not want, is what I keep on doing. (Rom 7:18-19)

This is so true, and Jesus knows it, and God the Father knows it. That's why Jesus had to come into this world. That's why before He left He promised to send another Helper, to be with us forever. The Spirit of truth, who dwells with us and is in us.

According to Jesus words, Christians know this Helper. Yes, but how do we know Him? We don't see Him, right? We may hear Him. But we definitely experience His presence. How?

Very often we are looking for some kind of extraordinary experiences. Sometimes we may have them. Sometimes. It differs from person to person. But there are things that we can be sure about.

God has promised and gives us this Helper in our Baptism. He has promised and gives His Spirit when we read, listen and meditate on God's word. He has promised and gives His Spirit when we receive the Holy Communion. If you can hear or read the word of God, if you can taste the bread and the wine, you can be sure that you receive this Helper.

Even more we can experience Him by results of His work. If we are here, if we call on the name of the Lord, if we trust that He is our God and we are His people, then this is only thanks to the Holy Spirit.

As Luther put it so wonderfully: "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith."

Our faith, our coming to the Lord, our desire to read God's word, to approach Him in prayer, all of these are gifts of the Holy Spirit, His work in us. Without the Helper, we can't do much.

But if we remain where the Helper comes to us, in the Divine Service, in reading and meditating of God's word, then we can bring much fruit. And this is "the fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (Gal 5:22-23)

This is exactly what we need be able to live Christian life, - these fruits of the Spirit. We need this Helper who can change our hearts, our motivation, our willingness to undertake what Jesus expects us to do. Who can give us courage and wisdom where we need it, who can give us patience and gentleness when they are required. With this Helper, and only with Him, we can hope to make a difference.

Now we get to our last question. Where does this lead us? Where does knowing God's will and having received the Helper, where does it lead us?

Even if we trust God we still struggle to grasp how different He is from anything in creation. We are used to think that everything has to be earned, deserved. Now we read these verses: "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

Doesn't Jesus require us to act first? Then, if we succeed, we can hope to have some reward from God. No, no, and no... this is not how God acts. This is not some kind of deal, - you do this, and I'll do this.

What Jesus speaks about, what God the Father is after, - relationships. Our relationships with our Father in Heaven, relationships of mutual love and trust. This is what the Father is longing for.

Think for yourself. We can't find God. He came to us. Our Creator. He came to us as one of us, so that only He could reveal His attitude towards us. He still sends His messengers, still speaks in His words to reach out for you. He promised and keeps giving you the Helper, the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, and not your choice brings you closer to the Father. The Holy Spirit enlightens you with the Gospel, and when you learn that you are so much loved by the most beautiful person, loved more than you can imagine!

Then we begin to realize that to be with this person, to live the life that He has prepared for us, that's a wonderful gift. Then we begin to see all commandments of Jesus not as burdensome tasks, but as wonderful opportunities to return a little bit of joy to the One, who give us everything.

Then we are not acting to earn God's favor, to get something from Him, but because we have Him, the Creator and Redeemer as our God. Relationships. God's love. This is what drives Christians. Then we can undertake tasks that would seem almost impossible and carry them on with joy.

This is something we can and I'm sure most of you have experienced. When God's love inspires you to love your neighbor, whatever hard it may be, when we do it, it really gives us joy that we can't compare with anything else. It is divine joy, joy that comes from God, who walks together with you, who dwells with you and in you.

This is what it means to be a Christian. When we, led by the Spirit of truth, learn God's will for us and for this world. When the Holy Spirit dwells with us.

When we rejoice in God's abundant love and are inspired to pour it out by serving others, so that people can be restored in their relationships with the Father and with one another.

That's wonderful privilege to have this life, let's enjoy it.

Amen.