

# Sixth Sunday of Easter + “If you love me...”



**Read:** John 14:15-21

## Reflection

The sixteenth-century church music composer Thomas Tallis lived in turbulent times. During his lifetime, the national religion of England went from Catholic to Protestant, then Catholic again, and finally more moderately Protestant, when the Elizabethan settlement established the Anglican Communion more or less as we know it today.

Very little is known about Tallis' life and character, but we can glimpse a few clues from his music. We know he was adaptable and willing to compromise, as he varied his style according to the liturgical requirements of the times. But it is also clear that he maintained his personal, catholic faith even when it was dangerous to do so.

One of Tallis' most famous anthems sets the words that we heard in today's Gospel. It uses the 1539 translation by William Tyndale: ***“If ye love me, keep my commandments, and I will pray to the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you forever, e'en the spirit of truth.”***

As this was written during the reign of the strongly Protestant Edward VI, one can't help but wonder how Tallis felt as he composed music for these words. In the midst of religious turmoil, when many of those who kept to the old faith were persecuted, did he feel the need for reassurance that, as long as he loved Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth”, would be there to comfort him?

Today's Gospel is part of Jesus' farewell speech to his disciples at the Last Supper, just after Judas has gone out to betray him. The “farewell discourse” was a common literary form at the time. It usually involves an important person announcing their impending death, recapping their good deeds, urging their listeners to stay united and follow their example, predicting persecution and picking a successor.

Unusually, Jesus does not pick a successor from among his disciples. He will ask the Father to send “another Advocate” (*according to the NRSV*), or “comforter”, according to Tyndale Bible. At first glance, the modern translation, “advocate”, doesn’t sound particularly comforting. It makes you think of a lawyer in a courtroom. But if you are persecuted and oppressed, then having someone to defend you would undoubtedly be a comfort.

The disciples will soon be reassured that the Holy Spirit is indeed coming to help them because Jesus himself will come to them. Although the world will no longer see him – because he will have been crucified – the disciples will see their resurrected Lord. When that happens, those who love Jesus, who have heard his teaching and do what he has instructed them to do, will truly know that God loves them.

For us, Jesus’ resurrection appearances are in the distant past. It is almost as if the situation has been turned on its head. We may come to believe that Jesus is alive, not because we have experienced the resurrection stories as the disciples did, but because the Holy Spirit inspires us to believe.

Some people are lucky enough to experience the Holy Spirit in a very direct and mystical way. Others – perhaps most of us – experience God at work through the actions and example of people who already love Jesus. Those who love Jesus, who follow his great commandments to love God and to love their neighbours as themselves, have something about them that speaks to others. It can be very clear that the Holy Spirit is within such people and working through them.

Some, like Tallis, may show their love creatively, devoting their lives to inspiring others to love God through their art, music or poetry. Others may show their love through practical action, either in a professional or voluntary capacity, or simply in the way they live. Anyone who cares for others as much as Jesus does, whether as part of their job or as a volunteer, can inspire others to love God, and love others as much as they do.

And when people love Jesus and follow his commandments, the Holy Spirit will be in them to be their helper and comforter. Loving Jesus in a vague sort of way is not enough. We have to follow his commandments too.

**Listen to Tallis’ Anthem here:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WSe0kv6ICU>

## **A Prayer**

Loving God,  
grant me the gracious help of your Holy Spirit,  
that in all things,  
I may serve you and keep your commandments,  
that through me,  
your love may be seen in the world.  
Amen.

