

Homily For the 5th Sunday of Easter- Year A

St Peter's Sunday 11:00 AM Live Streamed Mass - May 10, 2020

Acts 6:1-7 "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God to wait on (serve) tables."

Psalm 33 "Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him."

1 Peter 2:4-9 "Come to the Lord, a living stone, though rejected by human beings yet precious in God's sight."

John 14:1-12 "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Questions From Thomas and Philip

Introduction

Catholics can celebrate the sacred mysteries of our faith anywhere in the world. The mass is the mass in any language: We ask for forgiveness of our sins, we hear God's Word proclaimed, we offer bread and wine to God, then we witness the transformation of those little gifts, by the words of a priest and the power of the Holy Spirit, into the gift of God himself, which He gives back to us in the Eucharist at communion, and finally we are sent out to bring Christ to the world.

But today, everywhere we are being restricted from that most excellent 'Communion' with Christ. Many bishops, like our Bishop William, by their authority as shepherds, have dispensed the faithful from the obligation to attend Sunday mass. At the same time, we are reminded that we must not get used to this virtual gathering as the 'new normal'. It is a time for you and I never to stop asking for Reconciliation, and to grow in our longing to return to the earthly sanctuary, while we await whatever will happen around us.

El Camino

Years ago, my wife and I were many weeks into the step by step journey of the 'Camino de Santiago' in Spain. We were at mass on a Sunday. Despite my determination to learn the language before that trip, I understood what was going on only based on the fact that we knew it in English.

I was straining to see if I could figure out what Gospel passage was being read. Then I heard the words suddenly, as clear as a bell, "el Camino." I was so excited, because suddenly I knew exactly what was being proclaimed. The common pilgrim greeting in Spain was, 'buon camino': Have a good day on the path, on the way.

That Sunday's Gospel passage was of Jesus answering Thomas, who did not know where Jesus was going and so, of course, did not know the way, and Jesus emphatically responding: Thomas, I AM 'el camino', 'the way', the true path that leads to life.

Suddenly, both our physical step by step pilgrimage, and the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ were one and the same. That precious moment was a realization that the true way we were seeking on our earthly pilgrimage is Jesus Christ, who is the WAY to our heavenly home. Whether you are walking 10,000 steps a day with your Fit Bit, a thousand miles along an ancient pilgrimage route, or simply trying to figure out how to live safely day by day, that camino is Jesus Christ.

On Dwelling Places

Jesus explained to the Apostles that he was going to prepare a 'dwelling place' for them. Right now our dwelling places have become our safe place. For those who go out to work, it is an escape from danger. If we stay home, we do our best to bring the world to us through TV and the internet. For some, it might feel like a vacation for awhile but, if we are honest, it's not the fullness of life promised for those who love God, is it?

In a way, there is a tremendous blessing to experiencing the kind of vulnerability we do now. It reminds us that we don't have as much control over our lives as we often like to think we do. It also can suggest to us that, if we are wise, we will look forward to another dwelling place as our true home.

If we don't do that, Jesus makes no sense. We wouldn't need the mass, and the mysteries of our faith would hold no interest for us. But Jesus DOES make sense because he is the way to our true home. The way to where? Thomas wants to know. To the heavenly dwelling places, Jesus answers.

There is a richness to that place of dwelling. Space is not a problem. All people from all time are destined for heaven. But we cannot go there by our own efforts. We are too bound up with our sin and our broken human nature.

Jesus says to the Apostles and he says to us: Would I have told you I am going to prepare you a place if it wasn't true? Jesus is able to ask that question because he IS the truth. It's not just that he wouldn't lie about such a thing. He is not just truth-full. It's that in him there is only truth. He IS Truth itself. There is no such thing as truth outside of Jesus Christ.

On Living Stones

Today, the most common foundation for a dwelling is concrete, poured level and square, with a wood frame structure on top. In Jesus day, with stone construction, if you had a large stone

with straight sides and square corners, everything you put on top of it or next to it would be well supported, straight and true.

Peter describes Christ as a living cornerstone, perfect and precious, and yet for some reason rejected by human beings. That stone, Christ himself, has been made the cornerstone onto which and next to which we are to place ourselves as living stones, built into a house, a dwelling place.

A man was working from home. That happens a lot now. His ten year old son was tired of amusing himself, so was bugging his father to spend time with him. A little annoyed, and needing to get more work done, he took a page from a magazine, held it up to his son and said: Look, I'm going to rip up this picture of a map of the world. When you have put it back together, like a puzzle, I'll stop working and play with you. With that he tore the magazine picture into about a hundred pieces and dumped it into his son's hands.

He thought that would buy him about two hours, so was very surprised when his son came back in 15 minutes with the picture taped together, just as it was supposed to be. How did you do that so fast, he asked? His son's reply: Well, after awhile, I noticed that there was a picture of a man on the other side of the map. That was easier to work on. When I got the man right, the world was right too.

The man or woman has to be right before the world can be right. But Peter is saying that, if you want your life to be put together straight and true and strong, build it like a house around the precious and perfect cornerstone of Jesus Christ himself.

On Heaven

Do not let your hearts be troubled. But our hearts are troubled, aren't they? The more people I meet in ministry, the more convinced I am that even the most optimistic and upbeat and positive person has a troubled heart. I don't think Jesus is talking to just a few. I feel it in myself.

But deep down, we can only be troubled by sin itself, by turning away from the true path. The worst disease right now is NOT Covid 19. It's the disease that causes us to say: "I'm good enough." I don't need anything. I have Netflix. I'm entertained, so I don't need God. I certainly don't need or want a heavenly dwelling.

But heaven is not an eternity of trying to figure out how to pass the time. It is the state of knowing that we have everything we long for: When you think about the loss in your life that can't be undone; When we go to the fridge a dozen times a day and aren't really hungry; When we are overpowered by whatever that thing is we are addicted to; When we are always trying to justify ourselves before others; When we wake up in the morning with a sense of fear for

ourselves or our family members, or when we lie down at night feeling alone. But Jesus says: Do not let your hearts be troubled. I will return and take you to myself.

St. Thomas Aquinas reasons that one is perfectly happy only when all one's desires are perfectly satisfied. But this kind of perfect happiness cannot be found in anything in the world. It can only be found in something that is infinite and perfect – and this is God.

On Fatherhood

Today we will still pray the Our Father, asking for the grace to be able to pray like Jesus, to draw close and commune with him and the Father, who are one. The word 'Father' is repeated twelve times in just this short passage. Why is it so important to Jesus that we get this image of going to the Father and his perfect unity with the father. Thomas wants to know: Where are you going? To the Father, Jesus says. Philip demands: Show us the Father and we will be satisfied.

Not everyone has had the most wonderful image of a father. Some have had that taken away by circumstance or by human weakness. But Jesus answers Philip: Have I been with you all this time and you don't realize that to have seen me IS to have seen the Father.

In the garden he experienced the final conforming of his human will to that of the Father, in obedience, not to a tyrant who demands his son's suffering, but to the one who loves the whole world and seeks its healing, knowing there was NO OTHER way to atone for the sin of the world than to suffer, not just physical pain, but the unfathomable sorrow for the weight of the entire world's sin and separation from God.

Father's Day/Mother's Day

The Church has chosen readings for this day that would be powerful for Father's Day, and yet today we are celebrating our mothers, living and deceased. Christ and his Church have a lot to say about mothers.

Today we pray in thanksgiving for the mothers who said yes to our lives. Mary said yes to the source of life itself. She conformed her will to the will of the Father, which Jesus would do later in the Garden at Gethsemane: With her and with Jesus, we say: Not my human will but your heavenly will be done.

On Diakonia

Last week, the Gospel passage reminded us that Christ is the Good Shepherd, who gave that same authority to the Apostles. When tension occurred in the early Jerusalem Church, as it does in the Church in our day, the Apostles, the first bishops, laid hands on and ordained the

seven named first deacons, for diakonia, for service. They were to serve the widows and the poor. Like Christ himself, who is really the first deacon, they were to heal divisions.

Today, we are asked to be Christ for others, to serve those in need. But first we must answer two questions, the one from Thomas: How will we know the way?; and the one from Philip: Show us the Father. Let our answer be: The Way, the Truth, and the Life.