

Fifth Sunday of Easter (May 10, 2020)

Year A RCL

Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

“The Father’s House”

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Today and for the next two Sundays, we will hear what some scholars of John’s Gospel call the “farewell discourse” which begins in chapter 14 and concludes in chapter 17. After the Last Supper (chapter 13), in which Jesus washed the disciple’s feet and explained the rule of servanthood as foundational for them as followers (13:13-15), Jesus predicts Judas’ betrayal before the betrayer leaves the group of disciples that same night (13:18). Jesus also told His disciples that He was going away and that they could not come (13:33). When Peter intervenes proclaiming absolute loyalty to his master, Jesus forecasts that Peter will deny him (13:38).

It is in this context of anguish, distress, and agony where we begin our gospel of today. Jesus knew how difficult it was for the disciples to handle all these conflicting emotions at once, and how the upcoming days foretold gloomy times for them. Jesus said to them, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” This expression manifests itself in a reassurance that life will certainly bring better times.

Often the human heart is troubled with the discovery of obstacles which prevent the achievement of its desires, and ever so more when it encounters death of a loved one. The disciples hear Jesus' prediction, and recognizing the end of a time that they have enjoyed and known, they are now experiencing anguish. It is the same for us and for any person when we suffer the loss of a loved one or the end of a relationship; this process is commonly called grief.

The phrase of Jesus, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," is only the beginning of our consolation in managing grief. Jesus is a different kind of master and teacher. He offers the tools other teachers do not know when He adds, "Believe in God, believe also in me," confirming that the remedy to grief, anxiety, distress and any human obstacle is outside our own forces. The main impediment preventing us from having peace in our heart, is the unbelief and the inability to rely and accept God's presence and His intervention, in a way that is incomprehensible and beyond our control.

The act of believing is anchored to the Trinitary communion of God Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When He requires the disciple to believe in God and believe in Him, Jesus anticipates His later answer to Philip, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.... Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me". Those who know and trust in God will discover how the spiritual and material

presence of God permeates all human realities to the point of making only one distinctive principle: Love.

This love is manifested in the comfort that even after His departure, Jesus promises to return and take them to a place that He has prepared for them in the Father's house. The liturgy of the church offers the first part of this Gospel as a popular text for funerals and memorials, because it demonstrates the infinite love of God which surpasses death itself. Contrary to seeing our loved ones and any deceased in the realm of oblivion and abyss, we hear the description of the good place where we will find them, in one of the many dwellings prepared for them in the Father's house.

Is there in this unknown place that Jesus goes, a place for those still living or those without faith? Thomas voices a question that seems practical, but the reality is, it denotes his incapacity to trust and believe, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" The Father's house is a place that Thomas, the disciples, and the believers cannot describe or do not yet know the way, because it is a permanent and definitive place that is accessible only through our personal relationship with the Father in Jesus.

Thomas looks for a physical place where he can go, he imagines a route that takes him there. Jesus makes it very clear that the only access to the Father is

through Jesus Himself, similar as to what we heard last week, “I am the gate for the sheep”. Jesus affirms, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

In front of this immense declaration, it is important for us to recognize that Jesus' way, truth, and life is not an alternative or option. He is our one and only choice if we want to be in the Father's house. The sole answer to human happiness and the main goal in life is to become all that God has created us to be.

The “I Am” of Jesus is the same of YHWH of the Old Testament when God revealed His absolute power. When Jesus affirms “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” defines that exclusivity and total dependence on Him is necessary for His followers. It is here where the disciples are found with “troubled hearts”, since they are not yet ready to accept that there is only one truth or way, and that life in Christ Jesus is an individual opportunity.

The disciples like the modern believers delude themselves knowing different truths or ways or living fragmented lives. Like the “I Am” of the Old Testament, the relationship with Jesus demands Him to be the way, truth, and life as one in the same with God the Father. “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is

one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." Mark 12:29-30

God is unity and stability of love that never ends. If we want to progress in our way, life or know the truth, the only person from which we need to hear, learn, imitate and follow is Jesus. One of the modern dramas in Christianity worldwide is a divide and disembody set of doctrines and disciplines that use the name of God to their own purpose. This deplorable reduction of Christianity in having different ways or truths is a deviation of God, the "I Am".

We see in these pandemic day's examples of religion as doctrines far from the encounter with the person of Jesus. Some Christians may feel disconnected and fasting from God, others argue the need to receive sacramental communion over spiritual communion, or some manifest distress for the absence of worship in person. We even see politicians using the gospel to attack or advance their own party's positions and agendas during this time of increased stress especially among those most vulnerable.

All these expressions of nonsense are like the questions of Thomas and Philip. These are human worries that show how far we are from the true understanding of the eternal dwelling place of God. To gain access to the Father's house, a person needs to believe in God, to be in communion with Jesus,

and to understand that there is only One Way, One Truth, One Life that is Christ Jesus. Amen.