

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter May 14, 2017**

Readings: Acts 6:1-7; 1 Peter 2:4-9; John 14:1-12

Today's liturgy tells us that Jesus is our way, truth and life and we will receive the fullness of life in and through him. True living comes from developing ourselves to become all that we can be. Our life receives the full meaning when we are able to give ourselves to the service of others and find meaning in that service. Our true living comes by opening ourselves to God and to the world by becoming what we can be. The close identification of Jesus with God the Father is the over-riding theme of today's Gospel passage. At the same time Jesus invites his followers to identify themselves with him and his mission. Thus in the gospel of today taken from the last discourse of Jesus we hear him say that he is the way, the truth and the life. Those who believe in him will inherit eternal life. He at the same time stresses on his unity with the Father and our need to trust in him. The first reading from Acts tells us of the choice of the commencement of the ministry of diaconate where a group of pious and wise men were chosen with the specific task of service, an essential Christian ministry. Peter in the second reading speaks of the dignity of Christian life that all those baptized are the chosen people, a royal priesthood set aside for God. To live the fullness of life we need to realize our dignity as members of the Church.

The First Reading of today demonstrates one of the tensions that existed in the early community and gives us an account when service of diaconate was established. The Hellenistic group complained that their poor widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food from the common store by the majority group, the local Hebrews. Another problem was that some of the members were so overworked in the service of the community that they were neglecting other important duties. The solution arrived at by prayer and discernment showed flexibility and growth, optimism and imagination of the early community. It showed the church as an organization with an atmosphere of love, consideration and enthusiasm. It showed a church with each person treated equally with love, in the forefront of breaking down of ethnic and racial barriers. For this reason they established the new office of a deacon with a specific task to serve the community. Later we see the deacons also busy with evangelization and supporting the main body of the Apostles. Therefore the apostles expressed that it was not right for them to neglect the prayers and preaching in order to ensure everyone has sufficient food and commanded that seven men of good standing be chosen, those who are full of the Spirit and wisdom with the specific task of

serving the community. The reading tells us that being of one mind they solved their problem to ensure that the needs of all were being met without discrimination. This is what Christian love is all about of unity of mind and heart.

In the Second Reading of today Peter tells the Christian community that without foundation one cannot participate in the spreading of the faith or in any other spiritual activity unless we first grow in personal holiness. This growth is possible only when we let Jesus become the foundation stone of our life. As living stones of the church we become by the power of Jesus and his love members of a chosen race, sharing a royal priesthood. Like the Israelites of old we become a holy nation, a people set apart. It means that through our sacrament of Baptism we are specially selected and reserved for God as holy people. Even when we are rejected by others, deprived of all privileges, we become God's people, the chosen recipients of his mercy. Though we come from different races, nations and social backgrounds, we are united in Christ. Therefore we must realize our dignity as members of the church and live our vision to the full. The word royal priesthood would associate us with high rank in society and as priests we become mediators between God and man and therefore the task of reconciliation. Hence through this call we become God's own people, in order that we may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

In today's Gospel Jesus presents his identity with the Father while placing his emphasis on our identification with Jesus and his mission. During his final discourse to his disciples at the Last Supper Jesus tells them of his imminent departure and he knows that they are disturbed. Jesus is about to leave them, but he knows that his death will result in victory. There is a heavy air of gloom and anxiety, as the enemies of Jesus close in around him. At this juncture, he encourages his friends telling them not to be troubled in their hearts. He informs them of the necessity to trust in God and in him. It is a call to total faith in the Father and in Jesus. He tells them that in his Father's house there are many dwelling places, where he and his faithful followers can be together. The departure of Jesus is in order that he might prepare a place for us, a place where we will be eternally at home. We all are aware of the comfort, peace and quietness of being together with our families during great festivals. Here Jesus gives them great assurance that he will be with them after his death and will give new life to them as they are baptized.

He tells the disciples that they already know the way to the Father. The way is the obedience to the teachings Jesus gave and live in the manner in which he had

lived his life. The earliest name the Christian Community received was "The Way" and it was not until later at Antioch that they were called Christians. The Chinese Taoists use an attractive image of the way which is similar to that of Jesus. Tao says that the highest good is like that of water which benefit ten thousand creatures yet itself does not scramble. The way of Jesus is both a method of reaching our goal and the goal itself. Then we have the question of Thomas: "How we can know the way?" Jesus declares who he is in a memorable summary of the Good News: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life". I Am is Yahweh's own name and so Jesus directly tells the disciples of the sonship to his heavenly Father. In other words, the way to find the truth and life as God's chosen people is through Jesus. For, there is only one Mediator, Jesus, between God and mankind. Jesus therefore is for us his people, as he had said so often, the way to the Father, both by example and by identification with the Father. He is our unique means of salvation.

Jesus is also the truth because He reveals to us His Father's truth. In fact, He does more than tell us about His Father: He is the Father's revelation to us. The prologue of St. John's Gospel tells us "No one has ever seen God. It is God's only Son, ever at the Father's side, who has seen him and revealed Him". He is the truth, since in Jewish usage the truth signifies the divine order, as distinguished from the deceptive human order. He reveals the Father to us. He is the life that is not mere existence but sharing in the very life of God and communicating that life. Thus anyone who wants to know who God is and what he is like, must know Jesus. He has revealed the Father to us in His very being and life. He not only taught about a loving and forgiving Father, he lived his own life in a loving and forgiving way. He practiced what he preached. He taught in a very simple, down-to-earth way. So compelling was his personality and his words that people were anxious to hear what he had to say. To know Jesus means to have a personal, deep, warm relationship with him. The Way of Jesus, through his incarnation suffering and death, will end in the new and abundant life he wants to give to all his followers.

Jesus, in his humanity, is but the palest reflection of the infinite Truth, Goodness and Beauty of God. When we see Jesus, we see God but there is much that we do not see. Therefore we speak of Jesus as the Way. We go through him to find the total reality of God. Truth is here understood not in a purely intellectual sense. Truth here is that complete integrity and harmony which Jesus himself revealed not only in what he said but in the total manifestation of his life and person.

Truth for Jesus was not just something he knew or accepted or believed in; truth for Jesus was what he was in his whole person: thoughts, feelings, actions, relationships. It was that total conformity between his inward self and his outward behavior. For us to live Truth in that way is also to be fully alive, to be a "fully-functioning person", responding totally to that abundance of life which Jesus came to give us. And God the Father is, of course, also Truth and Life. But we go to God the Father through Jesus and we call Jesus the "Way" because he is the visible manifestation in human form of all that his Father is. It is this incarnation of the Father's being in the human person of Jesus, a man "like us in all things", which makes him the accessible model for us to grow ever more in the likeness of our God and to experience to the full his love and life in us.

The disciples find it hard to comprehend the relationship of Jesus with the Father. Hence Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father, as if to receive some extraordinary vision. Jesus clarifies immediately with the words that whoever sees him sees the Father. This surprises them all because for the Jews, God was invisible and there was always a distance between man and God. It was not easy for them to say that God is visible and Jesus is God himself. They were yet to understand that that the vision of God is given to them through the person of Jesus. He alone reveals the Father in the way he lives, in the truth of his word and through the new life he brings to the world. He reveals the Father in the ordinary events of life, and more particularly through his death and resurrection. He lived an ordinary life like any of us worked like us, suffered, tempted and finally died a painful death on the cross and in this life and death he showed the divine presence. To follow the Way of Jesus is not to go anywhere. It is to become a special kind of person, a person whose whole being reflects the Truth and Life that Jesus reveals to us. It is to be a person who is totally identified with the vision and the values of Jesus. To be such a person is to be a person of Truth and Life.

Towards the end of the passage, Jesus appeals to the evidence of all they have seen him say and do. He calls them to a deepened faith and tells them that they must believe in him when he says that he is in the Father and the Father is in Jesus. This can be understood totally in terms of mutual relationships between Jesus, the Father and his followers. He invites them to believe this on the evidence of his work, if for no other reason. Jesus has now been with them for three years, had taught them continuously and they had seen him teaching and working among the people. Now when he tells them that he is going away to

prepare a place for them, they find difficult to accept. When Jesus made this statement, it was to emphasize to His disciples that they should not worry when He will be gone. They will not be forgotten but he is going there to prepare a secure place for the apostles. Further he adds that the person of faith will do greater works than he did. The Church and every member of Christian community are called on to continue the mission of Jesus. People will certainly recall how Jesus fed thousands of people and today his followers do the feeding and healing of many more through their act of charity to bring the divinity of Christ to all. This is the miracle where tremendous work of salvation takes place all over the world.

Our primary response to God's self-revelation is one of faith, faith in the one who cares about us, about our well-being and needs, about our joys and sorrows. Let us remember that we have been called as members of the royal priesthood of God which is a very special and free blessing that is undeserved because of our sinful nature. This week, let us reflect on this blessing of being a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and god's own people. In thanksgiving, let us proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Let us remember that Jesus is our true way to the Father through the Church which He established and through which He continues His saving mission in the world. Our relationship with God is not merely an individual relationship. As the people of God, we belong to a community in continuity with those who have gone before, those who have passed on to us the traditions of faith. The Church is not a mere organization, but a community of faith over which the risen Lord presides and through which the baptized make their pilgrim way to the Father. Faith is a response to the person of Jesus, a personal and individual response to His presence in us and in our world.

The only survivor of a shipwreck was washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him. Every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect him from the elements, and to store his few possessions. One day after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, with smoke rolling up to the sky. He felt the worst had happened, and everything was lost. He was stunned with disbelief, grief, and anger. He cried out, 'God! How could you do this to me?' Early the next day, he was awakened by the sound of a ship approaching the island! It had come to rescue him! 'How did you come to know I was here he asked. They said we the signal of fire smoke you sent and came here to rescue you. The very thing he blamed God for was an

instrument to rescue him. It's easy to get discouraged when things go bad, but we shouldn't lose heart, because God is at work in our lives, even in the midst of our pain and suffering. Remember that the next time your little hut seems to be burning. It just may be a smoke signal that summons the Grace of God.

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