

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Many of us have been spending a lot more time at home than we usually do. We are looking forward to some of the restrictions upon us being gradually lifted. But I hope that this time has been a time of grace when we have rediscovered some of the simple joys of being together with our families. We may have been a bit more adventurous in the kitchen. Family meals may have been more leisurely.

For the last three years of his life, the family of Jesus was made up of those twelve disciples, those close friends, whom he was instructing to be the leaders of his Church. Jesus would have shared many meals with them. Our gospel today needs to be heard in the context of the last meal that Jesus was sharing with his closest friends. They were anxious and afraid. They knew that Jesus was about to leave them, and they did not know what was going to happen to them. Jesus urges them to trust in God still and trust in Him. Then he tells them that there are many rooms in his Father's house, and he is going to prepare a place for them there.

Jesus is not talking primarily about heaven here. He is talking first of all about the reign of God, the place where God is at work in the world. He is talking about our parish, our homes, and our lives. Jesus had come to establish the reign of God in our world. That reign could

only be properly established when Jesus left his disciples. It would only be when Jesus had returned to his Father that His Father's reign would be truly present in the world. The way to the Father for Jesus would be through his life-giving suffering and death. He tells his disciples that they know the way to the place that He is going.

But Thomas says that they do not know where Jesus is going and so cannot know the way. Thomas had not yet come to really understand who Jesus was. But his intervention allows Jesus to explain things more clearly. "I am the way" The only way to the Father is through me. "I am the truth." It is through me that you come to know the truth of who God is. It is through me that the love that God has for you is being revealed. "I am the life". It is in union with me that you will share the very life of God. It is in union with me that you will experience human life to its fullest.

Jesus then speaks of that intimate union that he has with his Father. "If you know me, you know my Father too. From this moment you know him and have seen him." Now it is Philip's turn to show how little he had understood of what Jesus had been doing. That can be encouraging when we think of the struggles that we have to understand Jesus and come to a deep faith in Him. The answer that Jesus gave to Philip's question must have

taken him quite by surprise. “The words I say to you I do not speak as from myself: it is the Father, living in me who is doing this work. You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.” Jesus wanted Philip and the others to reflect upon all that he had done, his works as he calls them, and to see them as signs of the power of God at work within him. What they saw him do was meant to bring them to faith in him as being one with his Father.

What is even more surprising is the way that Jesus talks about us. He says that all of us who believe in him will be able to do the works that he has been doing because of our union with him. “Whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself; he will perform even greater works because I am going to the Father.” While Jesus was on earth he was very limited in what he could do. He could only be in one place at a time, showing God’s love for a small number of people. When he ascends to his Father, he is free to be able to send his Spirit into each one of us. But Jesus tells us that we must ask that his works be done through us. When we are open to the Spirit of Jesus, when we ask him to be one with us, Jesus can do much more through us than he could when he was here on earth.

During the Easter season we read from the Acts of the Apostles. We hear how Jesus was at work in those early

Church communities of faith. Today we hear about the appointment of the first deacons. When Peter writes to us today, he reminds us that we are living stones making up the spiritual house where God lives in our world. Peter speaks of the choice that God has made for us. “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

When I prepare myself to celebrate Mass in private each day, I take a moment to think about all of you who are not yet able to gather to celebrate the Eucharist. I ask God to help you and me to use this time of limited association with others to be a time when our association with Jesus is strengthened. I ask God to help us to grow in our faith through our times of prayer and reflection. I ask God to help us to notice where God is as we take our walks or ring up our neighbours. I pray that we may be truly Church and live out the choice that God has made for us to live as people set apart to sing the praises of God who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.