

Synopsis: Easter V [A] Sunday (May 14) Homily on John 14: 1-12

Introduction: Today's readings tell us how the early Church accepted the challenge of keeping Jesus' memory alive by remaining a dynamic Christian community, bearing witness to Christ by their unity, fidelity in worship and spirit of loving and humble service. Today's Gospel introduces Jesus as the Way to God, the Truth to be accepted and the Life to be shared and lived.

Scripture lessons:The first reading, taken from Acts, shows us the early Church as a loving, serving and worshipping community (Acts 6:1-7). Hence, it easily solved a problem of perceived discrimination by instituting the diaconate for the service of the community. In the second reading, St. Peter advises the early Christians to renew the memory of Jesus by making their community a spiritual edifice built from the "living stones" of believers upon the "Living Cornerstone of Christ" (I Pt 2:4-5). Peter praises Christians, Gentiles and Jewish, as "*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God's own people.*" In today's Gospel, Jesus consoles his apostles who are sad and disheartened at the prospect of his arrest and crucifixion by assuring them that he is going to prepare an everlasting accommodation for them in his Father's House in Heaven. He gives them the assurance that he will come back to take them to their Heavenly abodes. It is then that Thomas asks Jesus where he is going and the way to reach him. Jesus answers Thomas' question with, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.*" The basic doctrine of Judaism is that Yahweh is the Way the Truth and the Life. Hence, Jesus is making a revolutionary claim that he is equivalent to Yahweh. Jesus declares that he is the safest and surest way to God, discrediting the notions that all religions are equally sure ways to reach God, or that no organized religion but only living a good life of sharing love is necessary to reach God. But Jesus the Way is narrow because it is the way of loving, humble and sacrificial service. Jesus is the Truth who taught revealed truths about God and God's relation to man. Jesus also taught moral truths by demonstrating them in his life. Jesus is the Life because as God he possesses the eternal life of God and shares his Divine life with his disciples through the Word of God and the Sacraments.

Life messages:We need to accept Jesus as the Way, Truth and the Life:

We accept Jesus as the Way by walking the narrow way of loving, humble and sacrificial service. We accept Jesus the Truth by learning and practicing what he taught as given in the Bible and in the teachings of the Church. We share the Divine life of God by making use of the means Jesus established in his Church. a)

By actively participating in the Eucharistic celebration and properly receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion. b) By the worthy reception of the other Sacraments. c) By the meditative and daily reading of the Word of God. d) By allowing the Holy Spirit living in the Church and within us to guide and strengthen us. e) By communicating with God the Source of Life, in personal and family prayers.

EASTER V [A] (May 14): Acts 6:1-7, I Pt 2:4-9, Jn 14:1-12 (L/17)

Anecdotes: 1) "My Father's house." When St. John Chrysostom was summoned before the Roman Emperor Arcadius and threatened with banishment, he replied, "You cannot banish me, for the world is my Father's house." "Then I will kill you," exclaimed the Emperor angrily. "No, you cannot," retorted Chrysostom, "because my life is hidden with Christ in God." "Your treasures shall be confiscated," the Emperor replied grimly. "Sir, you can't do that because my treasures are in Heaven as my heart is there." "I will drive you from your people, and you shall have no friends left," threatened the Emperor. "That you cannot do either, Sir, for I have a Friend in Heaven Who has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.'" In today's Gospel Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life, gives us the same assurance. *"In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be."*

#2) Surprises in Heaven: A few years ago, a minister of the United Methodist Church was forced out of his congregation and the ministry because he had the "audacity to preach heresy" during his Sunday sermon: "I'm in a Church," he said, "which acts as if God has a very small house, with only a few rooms and only one door. But thanks be to God, God's house, according to Jesus, has many rooms, many places to dwell. If it were not so, he would have told us." To add fuel to the fire, he explained his theory with a story. A good man died and was ushered into heaven, which appeared to be an enormous house. An angel began to escort him down a long hallway past "many rooms". "What's in that room?" the man asked, pointing to a very somber-looking group of people chanting a Gregorian Mass. "That's the Roman Catholic room," said the angel. "Very high church." "What's in that noisy room?" the man asked, pointing to a group of white-clothed people dancing, clapping and singing and occasionally shrieking out loud. "That's the Pentecostal group," said the angel. "Very lively." "What's in that room?" asked the man, pointing to a group of bald-headed people meditating to the sound of an enormous gong." That's the Zen group," said the angel. "Very quiet. You would hardly know they were here." Then the angel stopped the man,

as they were about to round a corner. "Now, when we get to the next room," said the angel, "I would appreciate it if you would tiptoe past. We mustn't make any sound." "Why's that?" asked the man. "Because in that room there's a bunch of very fundamentalist Christians; and they think they're the only ones here." In today's Gospel, Jesus gives a true picture of his Father's house.

Introduction: Today's readings tell us how the early Church accepted the challenge of keeping Jesus' memory alive in the Christian community by fashioning it into a serving and worshipping community (Acts 6:1-7), making of it a spiritual edifice built from the "living stones" of believers upon the "Living Cornerstone of Christ" (I Pt 2:4-5), and as the Father's House (John 14:1-12). Today's Gospel gives the image of the Church as a Church in glory in the Father's House. It also reminds us of the great truth that Jesus is the Way to God, that he is the Truth of God and that in him and through him we receive God's own Life. Today's readings demand from us real Faith not only in God the Father but also in Jesus precisely because he is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn. 14:6). "*You have faith in God; have faith also in Me*" (Jn. 14:1).

The first reading (Acts 6:1-7): shows how and why the early Church developed social institutions and Church offices to keep Jesus' memory alive. It tells us how the apostles and early Christians, as a Church community, prayerfully and amicably solved a community problem. It is the famous account of the selection of the first deacons in the church. The Greek-speaking widows complained that the Aramaic-speaking food-ministers were short-changing them at meals in favor of the Aramaic-speaking widows. The apostles solved the problem by convening a meeting of "the whole community of the disciples" and informing them that they should be the ones to work through their problem. Their task: "Select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to the task" of distributing the food (6:3). Note the names of the chosen seven: "Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolaus of Antioch." Everyone is a Greek! Luke tells us that the Church believed that if the Greeks in the community had a problem, then the Greeks in the community were important and gifted enough to solve their problem. The apostles ratified the choice of these community servants by praying over them and laying hands on them. The apostles' choice to solemnize the choosing by the ancient ritual of the imposition of hands on those chosen suggests something very interesting about service in the Church. The Apostles seem to be saying that the role of the community servant is worthy of what would become known as "ordination." That is, service is so important in the life of the Church, that we cannot be the Church of Christ Jesus if we're without mutual service. Service constitutes the Church, as do Word and Sacrament.

The second Reading (1 Peter 2:4-9): gives us a view of the Church as a spiritual edifice built from “living stones” upon the “Living Cornerstone of Christ” (I Pt 2:4-5). Our Jewish ancestors in the Faith had once been slaves in Egypt, then nomads in Sinai, then settlers for a few generations, then exiles in Babylon. So the notion of a permanent home, one made (at least in part), of stone, held great appeal for them. Thus, it was natural for Peter, while addressing the Jewish Christians, to use the stone metaphor to describe the place of Jesus in the plan of God. Peter quotes a famous line from Psalm 118 about the stone rejected by the builders becoming the cornerstone and contrasts those Jews who accept Jesus as their cornerstone with those who stumble on the stone. Peter then addresses all Christians, Jewish and Gentile, using the loftiest titles applied to Israel in the Old Testament: “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his [God’s] own. Peter uses startling images like newborn babies, a living stone, holy priesthood, chosen race, royal people, God's chosen, God's own, etc., to promote in all Christians a new sense of identity within the community of Faith. No one has ever expressed the dignity and importance of being a follower of Jesus more perfectly than Peter.

Exegesis: The context:The disciples are gathered together with Jesus on the last Thursday night of his life in the Upper Room for the Last Supper. The departing Jesus instructs them about how they may preserve his memory and carry on his mission. As his final hours on earth approach, Jesus prepares his disciples by explaining to them the full significance of what will happen. He will return to his Father and send them the gift of the Holy Spirit. And after dedicating their lives to leading others to Faith through the power of that Holy Spirit, they will be reunited with him in his Father's house. *“I am going to prepare a living space for you, a mansion, a place for you for all eternity... I will come again and take you to that place.”*

The misinterpreted words of consolation:By reproducing the consoling words of Jesus, the apostle John probably intended to bring a note of comfort to a group of Christians struggling to maintain their identity around the close of the first century. John was attempting to give courage and hope to people who found themselves in the midst of a very nasty fight with their passionate and fanatical Jewish neighbors in the Synagogue. They were the early Judeo-Christians who were frightened, vulnerable and defensive and whose survival as a community of Faith and their individual security and safety were in peril. It is clear that John’s aim was pastoral, an attempt to comfort those friends of his who were afraid and who needed assurance. *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in Me... “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one*

comes to the Father except through Me.” But some later Christians have used such a text of assurance and comfort, not to comfort one another as Jesus did. Instead, they have used it as a weapon against people who don't believe in Jesus, or who don't believe in Jesus the way they do, or who don't read the Bible the way they do, or who don't talk in public about their Faith and the way they feel about it as these folks do. These combative Christians seem to interpret the text as: "There is only one way to Heaven and that is our way!"

The tremendous claim by Jesus. The sages of India prayed every morning centuries before Christ the “*Shanti Mantra*” (“Mantra prayer of peace”) taken from Brihadaranyaka Upanishads (1.3.28), composed in 700 BCE, in the Sanskrit language: “From falsehood lead me to truth, from darkness lead me to light, from mortality lead me to immortality” (“*Aasato Ma SathGamaya, Thamaso Ma JyothirGamaya, Mrtjyor M a AmrithamGamaya*”). Centuries later Jesus gave the answer to their prayer through his tremendous claim: “*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.*” In fact, Jesus took three of the great basic concepts of the Jewish religion, and made the unique claim that in him all the three found their full realization. This means that he alone is the surest way to God. He alone can authoritatively and flawlessly teach us truths about God and he alone can give God’s life to us. John’s central message is that Jesus is both the revealer and the Revelation of God. If we wish to know who God is, what God thinks and what God wants of us, we must attend to Jesus the Word of God. “The Jesus of the Gospel does not only show us the way – his life of humble and generous servanthood is the way; he does not just philosophize about a concept of truth – he is the perfect Revelation of the truth about a God of enduring and unlimited love for his people; he is not just a preacher of futuristic promises – he has been raised up by God to a state of existence in God to which he invites all of us. In embracing the Spirit of his Gospel and living the hope of his Word, we encounter, in Christ, God Himself.” (*Connections*).

Jesus is the Way. We go to God the Father who is Truth and Life through Jesus and we call Jesus the “Way” because he is the visible manifestation in human form of all that his Father is. To those who teach that all religions lead us to God or that religion is immaterial provided man lead a good life, Jesus has the answer that he is the safest and surest way to God because he came from God and he can lead us to his Heavenly Father. The founders of other religions had either wrong ideas about the way to God or they were not sure guides. Lao-Tse (604-531 BC), the founder of Taoism said: “Get rid of all desires, you will have a contented life on earth, but I am not sure about the next life.” Buddha taught people to reach self-realization through total detachment and “nirvana,” but he was not sure if these

would lead one to God. Confucius confessed that he did not know of an eternal life or the way to attain it. The founder of Islam, Mohammed Nabi, admitted that he had no hope of the future unless Allah should put His mantle of mercy on him. However, Jesus claims that he is the only way to God. When a Person is a Way for us to get to the Father and everlasting life, that Way is found only in our relationship with Him, that is, in our union with Him in mind and heart, in will and action. But Jesus' sure way to God is the narrow way of the cross. It is the least-traveled way of humble, loving, self-giving and committed service to others. To follow the Way of Jesus is to become a special kind of person, a person whose whole being reflects the Truth and the Life that Jesus reveals to us. It is to be a person of Truth and Life who is totally identified with the vision and the values of Jesus. The medieval monk *Thomas à Kempis* the author of *Imitation of Christ* explains Jesus' statement, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life" thus: "Without the way, there is no going; without the truth, there is no knowing; and without the life, there is no living."

Jesus is the Truth. Gandhi said, "God is truth." Jesus is the Truth because he is the only one who reveals to us the whole truth about God. He teaches us that God is a loving, merciful, providing and forgiving Father. He also teaches us the truth that our Triune God lives in each one of the believers. Jesus is the Truth also because he has borne testimony to truth, demonstrating through his life and death the love of God for human beings. Truth here is that complete integrity and harmony which Jesus himself revealed, not only in what he said and did, but in the total manifestation of his life and person. Jesus is the Truth, the Word of God. To seek the truth elsewhere is to *stumble and fall*, to deal in falsehood and lies. So we pray the 86th Psalm, "*Teach me thy way, O Lord, and I will walk in thy truth.*" For us to live the 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 has come to give us.

Jesus is the Life. As God, Jesus has eternal life in himself. In addition, he is the one who gives us his life-giving Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Life also in the sense that he allows us to share in God's Life through the Sacraments. Christ rose from the dead for two reasons: first, to give us eternal life; second, to make us fully alive now. His Spirit animates every moment of our lives. To be fully alive is to be in God. Thomas a Kempis of *The Imitation of Christ* fame wrote, "Without the Way, there is no going. Without the Truth, there is no knowing. Without the Life, there is no living."

Life messages: 1) We need to know Jesus the Truth and walk Jesus the Way: Jesus asked Philip: *“Have I been with you all this time and you still do not know me?”* He is asking us the same question: “Have I been with you all this time – in the Mass, in the Sacraments, in the Bible in the worshipping community – and you still do not know me?” If we really believe that Jesus is the Way and the Truth and the Life, then we will find fresh and creative ways to keep alive his memory. Jesus asks us to keep alive his memory by reading and praying the Scriptures, by gathering in Jesus’ name and celebrating the Eucharist “in memory” of him, by handing on the great tradition of Christian Faith and by living according to his wise teachings. Jesus says, *“If you believe in me, you will do the work I do.”* This is the work he's talking about: creating safe, secure, happy places for one another in which the really important work of life - transformation and big-family building - can happen. We can help one another “get a life” in the same way Jesus did - by recognizing the powerful effect we have on one another, for good or ill, and by consciously deciding to make even our smallest choices add up into safe, secure, happy spaces where every member of our big family can grow whole.

2) We need to possess Jesus the Life. We share the Divine life of God by making use of the means Jesus established in his Church: a) By actively participating in the Eucharistic celebration and properly receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion. b) By the worthy reception of the other Sacraments. c) By the meditative and daily reading of the Word of God. d) By following the guidance of the life-giving Spirit of God, living within us. e) By communicating with God, the Source of Life, in personal and family prayers.

JOKES OF THE WEEK-1) “No thanks.” Evangelist Billy Graham tells of a time during the early years of his preaching ministry when he was due to lead a crusade meeting in a town in South Carolina, and he needed to mail a letter. He asked a little boy in the main street how he could get to the post office. The boy gave him directions. Billy said, “If you come to the Central Baptist Church tonight, I’ll tell you how to get to Heaven, God the Father’s house.” The boy replied, “No thanks. You don’t even know how to get to the post office and you are going to teach me how to go to Heaven?!”

2) To the Father’s House with two bags of currency: A stingy old lawyer who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness was determined to prove wrong the saying, “You can't take it with you.” After much thought and consideration, the old ambulance-chaser finally figured out how to take at least some of his money with him when he died. He instructed his wife to go to the bank and withdraw enough paper currency to fill two pillowcases. He then directed her to take the bags of

money to the attic and leave them directly above his bed. His plan was that when he passed away, he would reach out and grab the bags on his way to Heaven. Several weeks after the funeral, the deceased lawyer's wife, while cleaning the attic, came upon the two forgotten pillowcases stuffed with currency. "Oh, that darned old fool," she exclaimed. "I knew he should have had me put the money in the basement so that he could take it on his way down to Hell."

WEBSITES OF THE WEEK

- 1) Outlines of Bible books <http://www.catholicdoors.com/outline/index.htm>
- 2) New American Bible with notes <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/>
- 3) **Video reflections on daily gospel:** <http://www.usccb.org/bible/reflections/>

“Scriptural Homilies” Cycle A (No. 26) by Fr. Tony: akadavil@gmail.com

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