

May 07 V Sunday of Easter

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, 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.

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 allowing God to make of them "living stones" and build them into a spiritual edifice, a community of believers, with Christ for its "Living Cornerstone" (I Pt 2:4-5). Peter praises Christians, both Gentile 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 His announcement that He will be leaving them soon), 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 says, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" 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 also declares that he, himself, is the safest and surest way to God, discrediting the notions that all religions are equally sure ways to reach God, and that no organized religion but only living a good life of sharing love is necessary to reach God. But Jesus is the Way which he calls narrow because it is the way of focused, loving, humble, sacrificial service. Jesus is the Truth who teaches revealed truths about God and God's relation to man. Jesus also teaches moral truths and demonstrates 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. In short, Jesus reveals the Father in the Way he lives, in the Truth of his word and in the new Life that he brings.

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. 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."

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 to safe, secure, happy spaces where every member of our big family can grow whole.

2) We need to possess, and live out, 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; and e) by communicating with God, the Source of Life, in personal and family prayers.