

I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND LIFE

St. Philip and St. James, Apostle Sunday

6 May Anno Domini 2012

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John 14:1-14

Jesus said: “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

Grace, peace and mercy from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, AMEN,

In the first three Sundays of this Easter season, we had this recurring theme that the disciples did not know Jesus until He showed Himself to them. There was Mary who thought Jesus was a gardener until He called her by name. There was Thomas who refused to believe Jesus had risen until he saw the marks of the crucifixion. There were the two disciples on the road to Emmaus who did not recognize Jesus until He revealed Himself in the breaking of the bread.

Jesus told His disciples what He was about to do but they just didn't get it. Jesus told them He would be tortured and He would be crucified. They actually seemed surprised when it happened. He promised to rise from the dead and when He did, they just couldn't believe it. They never really did seem get it even after Jesus actually did the dying and the rising. They never really got it until Jesus showed Himself to them in some very physical way.

Now imagine that if they didn't get the crucifixion or the resurrection that when Jesus began to tell them about the Ascension and Eternal Life, they must have really been lost. Today's Gospel tells us that this is pretty much how it worked. Today's Gospel takes us back before the crucifixion where the disciples were having a really difficult time keeping up with Jesus as He tells them that He is preparing a place for them in eternity, a place with many mansions or rooms.

By the way, these situations really support the credibility of the Bible. If you were making up a religion, you wouldn't make yourself look like such a dolt, would you? For example when Jesus died on the cross you would tell how all His disciples gently took the body down from the cross and laid it in a very special room. Then all the disciples would have gathered together in an Easter vigil as they waited for Jesus to keep His promise to rise from the dead. You would want everyone to know how loyal, how faithful, how persevering you were, that is, if you were making it all up. In reality, the disciples scattered or hid in locked rooms. They

were definitely not the heroic types. The actual history of the events does not show the disciples in a good light at all. It's definitely not the way you would tell the story if you were making it up.

The account in today's Gospel comes from the last teachings of Jesus before His arrest. He and the disciples were in the upper room. Jesus knew that soldiers would arrest Him in just a few hours and that He would go to the cross the next day. As Jesus taught His disciples, He looked through the cross, past the resurrection, and out into eternity. He said, ***"In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going."***

Of course this all sounded very good to the disciples until Jesus said, ***"You know the way to where I am going."*** Thomas spoke for the disciples and said, ***"Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"*** Thomas also speaks for you and me and everyone who understands their sinful nature.

We too would like to know the way - the way out of this sinful world of decay and death. We would like to know the way to a world without injuries and medical conditions. We would like to know the way to a world without war and murder. We would like to know the way to a place where we will never wear out and die. We all seek a place of eternal peace - peace with God and peace with one another. We all seek a place without sin, sorrow, or death. That place is the Father's house. So, we join with Thomas and ask Jesus about the way to that house.

Jesus said to him, ***"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*** The way is not what we would expect. The way is not a route or a set of directions. Instead, it is a person - Jesus Himself. We cannot travel this route. Instead Jesus must take us. In fact, that is exactly what He promised in the earlier verse when He promised, ***"I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."***

This way is totally different from all the false religions of the world. In some manner, every other religion teaches that we must work our own way into God's grace. Some of the false religions even refer to a path, but it is a path that we must walk with our own abilities and efforts. These false religions of the world set us up for Satan's one-two punch.

Satan is more than happy to feed our egos and tell us that we can earn our own way into heaven, and the world is more than happy to help Satan out. The world sends you all kinds of messages that pump up your self-esteem - telling you that you need good works for heaven. Oh, those works, those deeds might be a bit of a challenge, but you can do it. Satan tells us, we're basically good people. Most of us are nice guys. Heaven is within our grasp. We just have to apply ourselves, put in a little effort, track the spirit, live the purpose driven life and it will be ours. This is Satan's first punch.

Many people succumb to Satan's first punch. They live a full and fulfilling life. They come to believe that everything is in order. All seems right with the world. Then they die and discover that they had been on the broad road which led to destruction.

There are some people, who are maybe a little more perceptive. They begin to see through the lies. They are realistic enough to see that they're not going to pull it off. They do a reality check and realize that Satan and the world lied to them and that they can never earn their way to heaven. It's then that Satan throws his second punch.

The second punch comes when Satan takes on his true identity as the accuser. He starts to load on the guilt. Suddenly, all the bad and evil things we have done in our lives come into our memory. We wince as we

see the foolishness of our youth. We cringe at all the evil images that leap into our minds as memory after memory show us how truly evil we are. The forces who once lied to us to convince us that we could make it into heaven on our own, now redirect us into another lie. They work very hard to convince us that our sin is more powerful than Jesus' forgiveness - that Jesus can no longer forgive us. This is the sin of despair. By the way, the poster child for the sin of despair is Judas who went and hanged himself.

This one-two punch of Satan's is the reason we should take great comfort in the fact that Jesus is the one and only way. Jesus is the only one who endured the worst temptations of the devil and the world and remained without sin. As the only perfect human, Jesus is the only one who can satisfy God's Justice. He is the only one who can endure the wrath of God against sin. His holy nature makes Him the only one whom death could not hold.

Jesus is the only one who could do all this because He is the only one who is truly God from eternity begotten of the Father and also man born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus left His Father's house and came to this earth to do the works of His Father. In His human nature He lived a righteous life under the authority of the law. He lived the righteous life that you could not live and He lived that righteous life for you. In His obedience to the Father's plan, He allowed the authorities to arrest Him, torture Him, and put Him on a cross. By doing these things He satisfied His Father's wrath against your sin. This is how He became the way for all of us to enter His Father's house. We have confidence that He is the way because He rose from the dead. This is why He could say, ***"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."*** His resurrection assures us that we too shall rise from the dead and that He will take us to live with Him forever.

Notice that Jesus said, ***"I am the way."*** He did not say, "I shall be the way." He is the way for us right now. That means that we do not wait for the day when all the rooms in the Father's House will be ready - the day of our resurrection. Jesus already brings heaven to us. Jesus says in Matthew 18:20: ***"Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."*** Or in Matthew 28:20 Jesus says: ***"Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*** His promises to be with us even though we cannot see Him and that means that eternal life with Jesus has already begun for those who believe in Him.

What gracious words Jesus shared with His disciples in that upper room on the evening before He went to the cross. His words are full of comfort and reassurance. How gracious it is that the Lord prepares a uniquely perfect room for each and every one of us in His Father's house. How comforting it is to know that Jesus will bring us to His Father's house safely because He Himself is the Way. How reassuring it is to know that Jesus is the full presence of God even with us now! No wonder He is called Immanuel, God with Us! How awe-inspiring it is to know that although we cannot see Him, Jesus is here with us now and He brings heaven and all its blessings with Him.

For in Christ Jesus all your sins have been forgiven in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in Jesus name, Amen and amen!

And the peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, AMEN!

