

**ECHOING GOD’S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
May 7, 2023**

Lectionary Readings:

Acts 6:1-7	Deacons are chosen for the ministry of service.
1 Peter 2:4-9	Christ is the cornerstone on which we rest.
John 14:1-12	"I am in the Father and the Father is in me."

John:

In John’s Gospel, we find a lengthy farewell discourse that Jesus delivers at the Last Supper. (Remember, there is no “Bread and Wine” scene at the supper in John; instead, we are given the “sacrament” of the washing of feet!) For the next three Sundays, the Church chooses passages from this discourse for its Gospel proclamations. There is an air of sadness, of leave taking, of separation.

But this departure is more of a reinsertion of Jesus into the very heart of the community! He will be with his followers in the depth of their spirit; He will be working through them wherever they go in time and space. His going leads to a presence that is even more real than the physical presence in his earthly body. In the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ will be in all of the disciples, all who will ever believe in him.

The exultation and glorification of Jesus comes as God’s gift to him because of his self-surrender, his total acceptance of the Father's will, his entire submission to the will of God. There is an essential link between the glory given by the Father to Christ and Christ’s suffering and death on the cross. The two go together. The Church cannot look for any other glory than that which was given to Jesus: the kind of glory that follows after a total giving of self to God. The Church receives power from God when it surrenders itself to death and to crucifixion.

The Second Coming, which the other Gospels describe as something that will take place in some future time, appears to be fulfilled in John’s Gospel by the imparting of the Holy Spirit. Time and again Jesus “breathes” his Spirit onto the disciples; He goes on to describe the effect: “Peace!” Christ has already come to those who love him and who have accepted his Spirit in their lives. Their lives are now governed by the dynamisms of the Spirit of Christ. They are no longer acting on their own or by their own energies. Christ is in them!

Thomas wants to know the “way,” that is the “physical road” to be followed so as to be with Jesus wherever he is going. But Jesus speaks of himself as the “way,” the means of access to God. He is the instrument by which we can have contact with God. We do not need to go anywhere, geographically. We allow him to give us his Spirit, and we will have immediate access to God. Jesus is also the “truth.” We who live in a post-Enlightenment era tend to think of truth as an abstract statement that has inner conformity with reality. The truth here does not refer to an intellectual statement that is not false!

Jesus is the truth of God! He is the real presence of God. God can really be found in him! There is a real identity between Jesus and the Father. He is also the “life.” In him, abides the life of God that he can give so that others too will live of God’s very life. He is God’s life to be shared.

Notice that Jesus' response to Philip is in the form of a question: "I have been with you all this time and you still do not know me?" It is not a reprimand; Jesus does not blame Philip. He merely asks that his faith become more complete! It is an invitation to interpret the evidence Philip has already seen and to commit himself to its conclusions.

The Church is invited by Jesus to the same kind of commitment. The "greater things" to which Jesus refers have to do with greater numbers of people, in more places, who will come to faith in Jesus through the ministry of the disciples. When the Church assumes the works of Jesus as its own works, "greater things" not yet seen begin to happen.

Acts:

Racism rears its ugly head even in the very first days of the Christian community! A solution has to be found so that no one in the community will be neglected while, at the same time, giving due priority to the preaching of the word. The leaders reach into the community of the ones who feel neglected and find there some persons who will serve. Shared responsibility taken from within the community itself is the solution. Deacons are chosen to act with the authority of the apostles so that human needs will be met.

Peter:

With the image of a *stone* to represent Christ, Peter shows that Christ is both the foundation of faith for those who believe and a rock wall standing in the way of faith for those who choose not to believe. But we have become the new people of God, a chosen race, established on the royalty of Jesus Christ, sharing in the priestly ministry of Christ the High Priest of the New Covenant. Only when our faith is solidly built on the rock that is Christ can we exult in this new stature and exercise the priestly privilege of worship. If we did not all share in the priestly role of Christ, we would not be allowed to offer even prayers of praise to the Father.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you have any sense that you *know* who God is? How have you come to this knowledge? Was it something you were born with? Who helped you acquire this experience? In what way do you know God better for knowing Jesus better? How can you get to know Jesus better?
2. How would you respond to a person who says he believes only what he can see and touch? Are the five senses the only avenues for knowledge? Things like *love* and *honor* and *goodness* cannot be seen or touched, yet they surely exist, don't they?
3. Discuss the meaning of the words *chosen race*, *royal priesthood* in the passage from the Letter of Peter. Do you have a sense that these words do apply to you, to the Church community? What difference does it make when we believe in those truths?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Seek out the groups in your parish or in your community where volunteers help take care of the needs of the poor: the St. Vincent de Paul Society, a soup kitchen, a food pantry, clothing and/or furniture centers, etc. Get involved, at least one hour per week.

PRAYER

Let us bow our heads and pray for God's blessing.

**Lord, help your people to seek you with all their hearts
and to deserve what you promise.**

Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

“Prayer over the People” 5th Sunday of Easter

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

In Jesus Christ the Risen Lord, we have the fullness of revelation of the Father. “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father,” Jesus says when asked by Philip to show them the Father.

Some of us speak loosely and perhaps at times incorrectly about Jesus as Son of God, Jesus as Second Person of the Trinity and equal to the Father in all things, Jesus as God. We say “God” when we mean “Jesus,” as in “when *God* turned the water into wine at Cana in Galilee!” We mean that *Jesus* turned water into wine.

Did *God* die on the cross when Jesus died that first Good Friday? Did *God* suffer the agony of the Passion? Was God raised to life on the third day? For that matter, was *God* born of the Virgin Mary?

The Church has had to struggle with this kind of language about Jesus and about God. From the very earliest centuries, Christians began to reflect on the data of Scripture and began to work out a language that would do justice to the whole truth about Jesus Christ: God with God from all eternity; yet born in time in human history as one of us.

We cannot separate the humanity of Jesus from the divinity of Christ. Although the New Testament shows a certain progression in its assertions concerning the divine nature of Christ, there wasn't a time in his life when Jesus was not truly and fully the Son of God. In our human way of speaking, we can say that Mary is the Mother of God because she cannot be the mother only of one part of who Jesus is.

In the Catholic tradition, dating back to the Council of Ephesus (431 CE), the Church has called Mary the “Mother of God,” not to define who Mary is but to assert the fullness of the divine nature of Jesus. One way to proclaim that Jesus possesses the fullness of the divine nature in addition to the human nature is to say: “Mary gave birth to God!”

We say that Mary is the Mother of God so that there will be no question as to our understanding of the divinity of Christ. These items may appear like a play on words or even be considered a mere subtlety by many people today. But words do have meaning, and the meanings of words do make a difference.

If Jesus is not truly divine, then our salvation has not been achieved in his Passion, death and resurrection. A mere human being could not be the bridge between heaven and earth. Only one who is both God and man can achieve our salvation. The one Christ, Word of God made flesh, is the one we adore as Lord.

(See **The Catechism: #65-73,516**)

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