

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 21/22, 2011

Deacon Tom Barford

On this 5th Sunday of Easter we hear Jesus trying to pick-up the sagging morale of his followers towards the end of the last supper, "Do not let your hearts be troubled" Jesus says. They needed a spiritual tranquilizer and Christ is offering it to them.

We owe Thomas the Apostle a lot for his bluntness. The Master said, "You know the way to the place where I am going." But Thomas needed further explanation. Thomas must have needed a AAA roadmap as well as road flares. His doubt probably provoked Jesus to say, **"I am the Way, the Truth and the I Life."** Just ten words but arguably the most important words spoken in the 5000 years of recorded history.

Thomas Kempis wrote in the 15th century, "Without the Way, there is no going. Without the Truth, there is no knowing. Without the Life, there is no living."

From time to time in our lives we have all gotten lost in our travels to a new city or even getting around in our own town in areas that we are not familiar with. And when we ask for directions we sometimes get more confused. Thankfully, Jesus is our guide in life. He does not give directions in hundreds of words. Nor does he say, "You can't miss it." Rather, he informs us confidently that he is the way. More to the point he says, "Follow me and I'll show you the way."

In today's Church there are many Catholics who "pick and choose" their faith. They seem to follow the "smorgasbord" Gospel. "I'll follow Jesus, they say, except when it takes me away from my material comforts of life."

CS Lewis said, "Christianity is a statement which, if false, is of no importance but, if true, is of infinite importance. But the one thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important."

There is a story about a man who falls off a cliff. On the way down he manages to grab a tree limb. With both hands grasping the limb, he looks down into a deep canyon. He cries out, "Help, please. Is anyone up there?"

After an unbearable silence, a voice answers, "Yes, I am here."
"Who are you?" the man shouts. "It's me, the Lord!"
Greatly relieved, the man says, "Oh, thank you! Have you come to rescue me?"

“Yes,” says the Lord. But you will have to trust me and do exactly what I say.”

“Anything” The man says. The voice says, “Let go. I will catch you.”

The man thinks for a second, looks down into the canyon, then looks up and asks, “Is there anyone else up there?”

This story indicates the dilemma we all face in our lives. Jesus says clearly, **“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** Jesus the eternal Son of the Father is the only Way. There is no one else up there. He alone can rescue us. But there is a hitch: we have to let go, trusting totally in him.

That’s why Jesus says no one comes to the Father except through him. And that is why Jesus can give what seems like an impossible command, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

But in the midst of all the anxieties, confusions and disappointments of life, how can we help feeling troubled? We are like the man clinging to that branch. Jesus invites us to let go and trust in him. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through him.

To hear these words from Jesus is the liberating good news that we can live and work in a fragile and violent world and not be overcome. Jesus, too, experienced things which trouble the human heart: misunderstanding and rejection, betrayal and abandonment, torture and dying. Yet in the deepest center of his heart Jesus was still able to know peace and joy because of his trust that he lived in the Father as the Father lived in him.

The Easter grace that we can receive today is the energizing faith that the Risen Lord desires to give us. In that faith we too can trust that with Jesus we live in the Father as the Father lives in us and does even greater work through us. And even in the troubling circumstances of our lives we will know the peace and joy which is beyond understanding, and which nothing in this world can take from us.

All Christians are called to be the light of Christ for all to see. So much so, that others are naturally drawn in the direction in which we are traveling; because we are what they want to be, and where we are heading they want to go too.

In order to be this kind of light to the world we need to live very close to Christ. He needs to be in our minds and hearts. We need to be thinking holy and unselfish thoughts. We must desire good things for our companions as we journey through life. We ought to be making sacrifices on behalf of others with a willing heart. It is in doing these sorts of things that brings the light of Christ into our lives.

All of us are precious to the Lord. We are all called to continue the mission of Christ on this earth. We have to hold our heads up through this muck of society. We have to have enough self-respect to avoid degrading ourselves by giving in to what everyone else says is acceptable in this modern day but what we know is unacceptable in any day.

We are called upon as Catholics to understand the great gifts that have been given to us by Jesus himself. For we are the Church, we are a royal priesthood; we are the people whom God has chosen to bring light to all who live in darkness. But we can't be light to the world while we have dark corners in our lives. We can't proclaim the goodness of God if we, who are his followers, are covering up secret sins.

We miss the call to be true Catholic Christians if we think that it is primarily a collection of doctrines and prohibitions. We are supposed to be Jesus for one another.

In the Gospel Jesus tells his disciples that, if they know him, they know the Father.

It is also true that if people know us, they should also know Jesus.