

Jesus: Two-Way Path to God's House

Fifth Sunday of Easter – 10 May 2020

Acts 6:1-7; 1 Pet 2:4-9; Jn 14:1-12

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6)

Prologue: In times when there were no motor vehicles, the image of way, road, path or pathway was highly significant, appearing some eight hundred times in the Bible. The idea of Jesus as the Way to God can be profitably used to link and reflect upon today's readings

Three Scriptural Signposts:

1. Today's gospel passage opens up Jesus' 'Farewell Discourse' (John, chapters 14–17) to his disciples, who sense that he is not going to be physically present with them for long. They seem anxious and troubled about their future. So, Jesus reassures them by saying, “Do not let your hearts be troubled” (v.1). He promises them that he will not only go away for a while, but that he will also return “so that where I am, there you may be also” (v.3). There is a two-way movement, here—up and down, so to say—with Jesus speaking of his death, rising and second coming in glory. When Jesus says: “In my Father's house there are many dwelling places” does he intend to distinguish and divide earth from heaven, and this life from the afterlife? Not likely, since he harmonises in himself human and divine, earth and heaven, this life and the afterlife. Unable to understand Jesus' promise, Thomas asks a frank question: “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” In answer, Jesus reveals himself as “the way, and the truth, and the life” (v.6). What exactly is ‘the way’ of Jesus? One could think of the coming and going of Jesus in terms of a 2-way path: the incarnation-birth as the downward movement, while the resurrection-ascension being the upward. One can also think of the image of a ladder which enables someone not only to climb up but also to descend, down. Jesus is that 2-way path or that ladder that shows us, human beings, on the one hand, how to reach and touch God, and on the other, how God has reached out and touched us.
2. Jesus' way is not just some roadmap to reach heaven, but is a way of life: dynamic, animated by love, marked by service, and Spirit-driven. During his lifetime, Jesus had often invited his disciples to follow in his footsteps, to walk “the hard, narrow road” (Mt 7:14) and to stand by him in Jerusalem when he would be handed over, persecuted and killed. They did not seem to understand the importance of this except, of course, in the later light of the resurrection and the power of the Pentecost. This passage comes after the Last Supper wherein Jesus gives his disciples the ‘new commandment’ to “love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34). By washing their feet, he shows them a ‘way’ by which they'll be recognized: “By this will all know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (Jn 13:35). Thus, Jesus' way is one of love, service and self-sacrifice animated by ‘right thinking’ (Truth) and ‘right action’ (Life). Interestingly, the Jesus Movement of newly baptised believers was called ‘the Way’ (Acts 9:2). The early Christians so faithfully followed Jesus' footsteps that they could be considered ‘mobile maps’ of The Way, Jesus, by their words and works. Today's first reading describes a ministry of ‘the Way’: that of ‘deacons’—from the Greek, *diakonia*, ‘to serve’. It's wrong to interpret this reading as some ministerial ‘division of labour’ with the Twelve devoting themselves solely to ‘spiritual’ pursuits (namely, “prayer and the service of the word”) while

the Seven specialised in ‘secular’ activity (i.e., distributing bread to widows). What is noteworthy is that ministries are slowly evolving in the *Way* based on ‘human need’ and Spirit-inspiration in conformity with the ‘way’ of Jesus. As needs increased, new ministries evolved.

3. The limited experience of the disciples and their Jewish background do not help them to fully understand Jesus’ revelation and rising. Thus, like Thomas, Philip also asks a question about God whom Jesus addresses as ‘*Abba*’. Jesus mildly upbraids him, saying: “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (v.9). Jesus is “God’s Word become flesh” (Jn 1:14). Jesus is God’s face, hands, feet, etc. The Son cannot be separated from the Father; rather, God’s heart is revealed in the Son’s love and life. In sum, the way, truth, and life of Jesus can be summarised in one word: Love!

Linking the 2nd Reading and the Psalm to the Theme of God’s House and Heart:

In the second reading Peter speaks of the Christian community as “a spiritual *house*”. Referring to their baptism and anointing in Christ, he reminds them that they are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” The response of psalm (32): “May your love be upon us, O Lord, as we place all our hope in you” is a plea to God to continue loving us for God is our only hope and trust.

Three Current Concerns:

The Exclusivist Concern: Jesus’ revelation: “I am the way,” sometimes leads fundamentalists and fanatics to hold that only Christians—and not believers in other religions—can be saved. Thus, they develop a holier-than-thou and exclusivist attitude, despising all so-called ‘non-Christians’. Let’s remember that Jesus does not only want us to know the way but to *walk the way*: of the cross!

The Consumerist Concern: The ‘Where’ or the end-point of our earthly life is God’s Home, our Eternal Home: heaven. However, while we might preach much about heaven, our practical life on earth could indicate that we are so fully obsessed with an ‘eat, drink and be merry’ kind of life with no care for things eternal and spiritual. Let’s never forget Jesus’ Second Coming.

The Motherly-Fatherly Concern: Today is celebrated as Mother’s Day. Abba-God, our Father, is beyond gender and is as much like a Mother who gives birth, feeds, nourishes, teaches to walk, holds us close to Her cheeks and heart. So, let’s strive to cultivate the mother within us believing that ‘another world’ – a ‘mother world’ is possible. Let’s pray for all mothers, worldwide.

In Lighter Vein: A parish priest was once shocked to peep into a bar close to his church and see his parishioners drinking and making merry. He barged into the bar and asked all his parishioners to follow him into the church. He then chided them for drinking in the bar and delivered a homily on the evils of alcohol. Finally, he asked, “Don’t you all want to go to heaven?” All put up their hands and said, “Yes!” Except one man. He shouted once again: “Don’t you all want to go to heaven?” Once again, a resounding “Yes!” with the lone man silent. Father then went up to him and shouted: “Don’t you wanna go to heaven?” He whispered, “Yes, Father! But I thought you are going there *now*; and, I prefer going back to the bar to finish my drink!”

Prayer: Loving Lord, be my way, teach me your truth, fill me with abundant life, Amen! [End]