

Sunday, May 10, 2020

(Cape Breton, Nova Scotia)

Gospel Reading: John 14:1-12

“I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life” (Jn 14:6)

The context of this Sunday’s Gospel reading is Jesus’ imminent physical departure from this world bringing an end to his earthly life and human relationships. His departure will mark the culmination of a life that was lived to show his followers the **Way** to the **Truth** that leads to **Life** (v. 6), and life in abundance (Jn 10: 10). First, Jesus begins this farewell discourse by exhorting his followers to not let their hearts be troubled, but to continue to believe in Him. Those who believe in him and in his teachings have no reason to be troubled or anxious. He had already told us not to be anxious (Mt 6:25, 31, 34; Lk 12:22, 32), because the heavenly Father knows what we need, including the Kingdom (Mt 6:32-33).

It is important to reflect on these words of Jesus’ farewell discourse in John’s Gospel. How come that we continue to be anxious and worried in spite of the tall claim we make that we believe in Him and in his Gospel? The answer is quite simple. One principal reason for our worry and anxiety is that most often what we believe is **not** in Jesus or in the heavenly Father. Rather, we believe in a prosperity Gospel, which promises material blessings, good health, and good social security. And, in the absence of these things, we are anxious, worried, exasperated, and end up becoming spasmodic believers. Jesus never promised us a prosperity gospel. He only told us that our heavenly Father loves us unconditionally, and the question of how the Father loves us unconditionally is best left to Him because “His ways are not our ways” (Isaiah 55:7-8), and the heavenly Father knows best what we need (Lk 12:30).

Secondly, we are anxious and worried because what we have is not so much faith as beliefs. Well, we all have beliefs and belief systems. And, they are good. Beliefs introduced God to us and set us on the path of further knowing God. However, beliefs are mostly academic and a matter of the head, whereas faith or trust is a matter of the heart. What transforms me are neither belief systems nor my head, but my heart which alone is capable of deeply trusting. Beliefs do not necessarily lead to me to love, but faith or trust does. Years of thinking and learning about Jesus or God from a particular perspective and from a limited worldview can keep us from knowing Him as **He** wishes us to know Him. Beliefs and belief systems do not necessarily make me free from anxiety and worry. It is Faith that transforms me; it is faith that liberates me. And, faith or trust is not so much about beliefs and belief systems as about “falling into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31). Then I am free from anxiety.

Now, we come to the major theme of today’s Gospel: **I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life** (verse 6)

Jesus is the **Way**. This is very important. It is not enough to proclaim Jesus as the Christ, because even after a solemn oral proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah and Christ (Mark 8:29), I could still be a Satan (Mk 8:33). What is more important is that I accept Jesus as the Way. When I accept him as the **way**, I am on a journey with Him and should be willing to accept all that a journey implies. In a journey, I cannot stay stuck at a particular location, and cannot stay fixed to some ideas. In short, to be on a Way is to be detached, to leave behind, and let go. A letting go is necessary in order to follow Him on the Way. This following or journeying is what St Paul calls “walking according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:4). The Spirit is never static, but always dynamic. The Spirit is never an advocate of external consistency, because it **blows where it chooses** (John 3:8), and so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. It is by “walking according to the Spirit” on the **Way** of Jesus that I can arrive at the Truth. And, that takes us to Jesus as the **Truth**.

When Jesus says that he is the **Truth**, He is **not** speaking about any scientific, philosophical or an epistemological truth, which are usually sought by the intelligentsia. That sort of truth is usually comprehended by our head. God created both the head and the heart. However, God can never be known by the head, but can only be experienced by the heart, because the truth about God is that God is Love. And, love is possible only with the heart. **Blaise Pascal**, the 17th century French philosopher, mathematician, scientist, inventor, and theologian, once said, “The heart has its reason, which Reason (the intellect) does not know.” Yes, the head can never experience Love, which is God’s Truth.

So, when Jesus speaks about himself as the Truth, he is not thinking about any universal synthesis he has discovered. It is we humans who think of truth as a synthesis, a uniformity, without any room for plurality. We always think that if something is to be true, it has to be one, and not many. For humans, differences and dissent are outside the system of truth. But, for God, Truth is **not** one, but **many**. Truth is multifaceted because the God of the Bible is a Trinity, three in One. The God of the Bible is a community, which entails sharing, accepting, accommodating, and forgiving. Therefore, the Biblical God has to give in, let go, and be vulnerable. Professor Walter Brueggemann, the renowned Anglican American scholar of the Hebrew Scriptures, therefore, summarizes the Creed about this Biblical God as a God who is “faithful, forgiving, gracious, merciful, and steadfast in loving us” (Exodus 34:6). For the Trinitarian God, to be Truthful is to be inclusive.

However, to experience this Truth about God as Love, one needs to be guided by the Holy Spirit. That is why, Jesus told his disciples, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13). It is the Spirit who will teach us the truth for which I must allow myself to be guided by the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). Centuries ago, the great Catholic theologian St. Thomas Aquinas had said, “If something is true, no matter who said it, it always comes from the Holy Spirit.” Without the Spirit, no one can experience this Truth. It is quite revealing to note that when Pontius Pilate asked Jesus “What is truth” (John 18:38), Jesus was silent. Because, Jesus knew that Pilate would never be able to comprehend God’s Truth which is Love. Someone who uses only his head, someone who has only **ruled over others without ever being a servant**, will never be able to understand the Truth of God, which is Love. A Mother, whom we

honor this Sunday, is able to understand this language of Truth as Love, because she has always been a vulnerable servant. And, Love leads us to Life. That takes us to Jesus' words, "'I am the Life.'

"I am the **Life**" is, first of all, an invitation to abide in Him (John 15:4) so that we may have life. This is also our basic human experience. As we celebrate the **Mother's Day** this Sunday, May 10, we are reminded of the life we received from our mother by abiding in her for 10 long months, drawing life from that never-ending source of life and love. An abiding is imperative. Secondly, if Jesus was the Life, he did not cling to it, but gave it up (John 10:15, 17, 18; Philippians 2:7-8). Similarly, the life Jesus gives me is not to make me cling to it; but rather, that I may glorify the Father in heaven by bearing fruit for others (John 15:2, 8). My life is a libation to be poured out so that others may have life.

However, if I keep on pouring out my life as a libation for others, I can get totally drained. How do I keep the demands of love from draining me? St. Catherine of Siena, the great Catholic Mystic, writes, "It is just like a vessel that you fill at the fountain. If you take it out of the fountain to drink, the vessel is soon empty. But if you hold your vessel in the fountain while you drink, it will not get empty: indeed, it will always be full" (*The Dialogue*, chapter 64). Hence, we need to abide in Him to drink of that living water, so that I may always be full, experiencing eternal life (John 4:14). Amen.

We, the parishioners, wish all our wonderful Mothers a very Happy Mother's Day.

It is YOU, dear Mothers, who made us who and what we are.

God bless you.

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