

Fr James' homily for the Fifth Sunday of Easter 2020

First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 6:1-7
Second Reading: First Letter of St Peter 2: 4-9
Gospel: John 14:1-12

The Gospel this Sunday is part of Jesus' passionate discourse at the Last Supper, foreshadowing the meaning of the resurrection, the new life he will win for us in his death and resurrection, and the whole mystery of God, into which the resurrection invites us is a new and privileged way. ***"I am the way" "To have seen me is to have seen the Father."***

I once received a letter of complaint after a funeral. At that funeral today's Gospel was the Gospel that was proclaimed, as it often is at funerals, and yet the two daughters of the deceased wrote to complain: how dare I say such arrogant things? Jesus, they wrote, might be my way, but he was most certainly not theirs, and whilst they were giving their mother a Christian burial, they knew better, and the funeral should have reflected that!! I pointed out to them that the words were not my words, but the words of Jesus, and that the Church makes no apology for proclaiming them. Jesus presents all of creation with an invitation - to accept his way, his life. The job of all of us, his Church, is to accept that invitation ourselves, to put it before others, and to seek ways to enable others to accept him too!

Jesus risen from the dead, the faith of Easter, means that the way is open, and there is no other way. The way to peace, to happiness, to fullness of life and to eternal life is through Jesus, crucified and risen. Once again we see the paradox of our faith: to gain life we must let go of what we think is living. Everything about us must be for Jesus and about him, not us. To use shocking and emotive language, we must be his slaves - the New Testament says as much. The Good News of Easter, though, is that this "slavery" is in fact true freedom; life as we are meant to have it; life that in our actual slavery to sin seems unimaginable to us. Like the two grieving daughters who took such exception to Jesus' words in their letter to me, people so often want to settle for an illusory freedom that is a real slavery - to restlessness and anxiety and aimlessness.

Last week I suggested reading the letters of St Peter (they are quite short!) We carry on that reading today at Mass and I urge you to ponder the second reading and let St Peter's emotion and passion speak to you. He describes exactly what I have described in the story above. The Lord IS life, he says. There is no other. For those who reject him, his words are nonsense and a hindrance. St Peter gives us his advice: ***"set yourselves close to him."*** This is such a beautiful picture, is it not? Imagine yourself

simply close to him, at that Last Supper, at the Cross, and in the scenes of Resurrection, and let this become in every way our way of life. For in this way we make everything about us, bit by bit, open to him, we become his slaves in the Easter sense of the word, and we become, as St Peter says, priestly, set apart, to bring the light of the resurrection into every corner of creation.

This week sees the feast day of Our Lady of Fatima, which you know is dear to my heart. I suggest too this week asking the prayers of the saints of Fatima, Francisco and Jacinta Marto, who followed the invitation of Jesus to make everything in their lives about him in an extraordinary way, leading so many to know Jesus. Young Francisco, aged 9, took things very literally and took every opportunity simply to be close to Jesus, by sitting near the tabernacle in church, to keep Jesus company, to console him, as he put it. Ask their prayers too, because their lives in this world ended, in 1919 and 1920, as victims of the pandemic of the Spanish Flu. They are close to the suffering of so many today, and will help us transform this crisis we are in. (*We've put a picture of the visit of the relics of Ss Francisco and Jacinta to our parish in 2018 on the home page of the website today, with a quotation from St Francis Marto about the God we cannot begin to imagine.*)

Accepting the invitation of Jesus is not easy and is a constant work-in-progress for each of us and for us together as the Church. We need the grace of God to do it, and God willingly lavishes that grace on us if we will just reach out for it. Evil always wants to cause division and despair. All of this we can see in the scenes from the Acts of the Apostles we read on the Sundays of Easter and today is no exception. The response of the Church then to a particular problem was to look for the presence of Jesus and refuse to be divided. As we read on in Acts we see that it is hard work!

How to be Church in the challenge of today's circumstances. How to keep on accepting Jesus personally in the midst of fear and unfair suffering. Where do we start? Always the same: hearing Jesus say ***"I am the way", "Trust in God still and trust in me."*** To be close to his resurrection always comes alongside being close to his suffering. Let us pray for our parish and all the Church now as we seek the best way to serve him in a world of pandemic.

Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a happy continuing of the Easter season. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch.