

10th May 2020: 5th Sunday of Easter

John the evangelist dedicate five chapters to the Last Supper. This is where we find the testament that Jesus has left. They are his last words, the most sacred. Today's text is part of this testament. We are going to approach this text with some apprehension and try to understand the message of every word uttered by the Master.

We are in the Upper Room and Judas has just left. Although Jesus had never hidden from his disciples what his destiny would be, he now says it clearly: **I am going to leave you**. Three years have passed since the disciples joined Jesus on the shore of the Lake of Galilee. The disciples had allowed themselves to be involved in the message of Jesus so much so that they had given up everything to unite their lives with the life of Jesus. And, that night in the Upper Room, they heard this dramatic announcement: **Jesus is about to leave them**.

How do they react? They are distressed and disgusted. They are afraid, they are lost. They realize that the dream of glory that they had cultivated for three years is now fading. **Reality is very different from what they had expected. They face failure head-on.**

To these lost and bewildered disciples Jesus says, **do not let your hearts be troubled**. The Greek verb used here indicates the churning of the waves in a rough sea. So are the hearts of the disciples. Jesus realizes that the disciples are distressed and displeased and speaks to them to reassure them. He does what Moses did before he died.

Moses had gathered the people and he said to the Israelites: **Fear not, do not lose heart. The Lord will walk before you. He will continue to guide you. I will no longer be there, but God will use someone else & lead you towards the land of freedom. Have no fear. Don't lose hope.** Similar words are the ones the Jesus uses with his disciples. These words of Jesus are not only spoken to the Eleven. They are also relevant for us.

Today we are also concerned and with many fears in our hearts. Jesus is no physically present amongst us as he had been with the Twelve who had accompanied him for three years. But Jesus is always present, although not visibly. And we have the impression of being alone to carry out this new world project.

As a Church, we experience the hostility of the world. It would seem that it is evil that triumphs and that there are even some who say that the Church is in decline and that it will gradually disappear.

Even some Christians question the truth of the words of Jesus who had assured that **the gates of hell will not be able to resist the force of the kingdom of God. We are concerned not only because of the hostility of the world, but also because of our fragility, of our weakness and infidelities.** In short, we feel so incapable to carry out the mission that Jesus has entrusted to us. We also have the feeling of being in the middle of waves of a rough sea. Jesus takes our fears into account. Even a little earlier, he had told the disciples that one of them would betray him, and the evangelist notes that even Jesus was troubled internally and used the same verb that applies to the agitation of the disciples. Jesus too was deeply and inwardly troubled. **It is a comfort to know how close Jesus is to us, how he understands us because he also has been through the same as us.**

What remedy does he offer to appease our cravings, our bewilderments? Continue to believe in God and continue to believe in me. Trusting the Gospel for a little while is easy, but it is

difficult to hold fast and not to doubt even when history seems to deny what the Master has said.

Jesus says, you must calm your cravings, trust my word. **Many of our anxieties come from the fact that we look at the history with our eyes, not with the gaze of God.** We focus on the present moment and we would like to see immediately the full realization of the kingdom of God. **We will never see the fulfilment of the kingdom of God, not even Jesus saw it.**

If we become aware of our smallness, if we make peace with our limitations, if we live the concern to the Lord, we will regain the serenity. We trust in the word we believe in, the Word that gives us the certainty that no drop of love will be lost. Jesus continues: **“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places... I am going to prepare a place for you”**. What do these words mean? Let us ask ourselves, **where is his Father’s house? Let us not think about paradise.** Jesus is talking about something else. He has called the Temple “my Father’s house”. Jesus has said that the Temple would be destroyed and that God will build another Temple not made of material stones.

Jesus himself is the Temple from which the sacrifices would come pleasing to the Father, the works of love, the gift of self for love. And this is the burnt offering, the incense pleasing to the Lord. **Jesus is the Temple. Jesus is his Father’s house, and we are called to be living stones, united to him, foundational stone, living stones of this Temple.**

In the house of his Father, to which we also belong, there are many dwelling places, one for each brother and sister. **No one is excluded.** There is room for everyone and there is a mission that everyone has to carry out. Each of us has received gift of God, gifts that must be used for the lives of our brothers and sisters. This is the place that everyone has in this temple that is Christ. And **“if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again & take you to myself so that where I am you also may be”**. What does that mean? What place will he prepare for us? Again, let’s leave aside & not think of a numbered armchair in paradise. No, it’s not like that. Jesus went first to prepare the place for all us. Where did he go? He went to donate his life. This is the place where he waits for everyone who trusts in him. He says, “I’ll be back”. **He goes first to donate his life, then he returns-not to the end of the world, he returns today to also take us that we can be by his side and like him & with him donate our lives for the love of the brothers & sisters.** And a special note: when we let ourselves get involved in this sharing of love with him, we will be able to celebrate an authentic Eucharist. Because this is the Eucharist: saying **YES** to the spousal proposal of union of life that Jesus invites us to. We welcome, with the gesture of eating that bread, we make the gesture of assimilating Jesus with all of his love story and we unite our life to his. And now Jesus introduces the theme of the way.

What is the path that leads to where he is, because he wants us to be by his side? Let’s listen to Thomas’ reaction: ... He appears three times in the Gospel of John & we like him because he resembles us, reacts like us. Whenever he is mentioned in the gospel, it is almost always added that he is called ‘Didymous’ – twin. Our twin. After Jesus said: You know the way” Thomas reacts immediately & says, Lord, we don’t know where you are going. How can we know the way? **Jesus response is addressed to Thomas and all his ‘twins’.** It is very important because we must fix well in our minds what is the way to come to life. Jesus says to him: **“I am the way,**

the truth, & the life". This statement must have sounded very strange to them because they have learned in catechesis that the way to come to life was the observance of the Ten Words, of the Ten Commandments. From now on, no more. **The Commandments are fine, but if you want to reach the fullness of life the way is another. The way is the same person as Jesus. If you pursue another path, even if they lead you to apparent successes, even to conquer the entire world, they are paths to death.** In Antioch, before Christians were called by this name, they were known as "those of the way" because they followed "the way" that is Jesus. Thomas knows where Jesus was going, he going to death. And he sees the gift of life as the end of everything, as the ultimate defeat. And Jesus says to his disciples who are afraid to go to Judea: "Let's go to Bethany where Lazarus is asleep". The disciples tell him, "Don't go because they want to kill you". And Thomas says, "Let us also go and die with him". Thomas, who has not yet seen Easter, sees 'this way' which is Jesus, who goes to death. He thinks of this as the ultimate destination. He has not understood that the way to reach life passes through this gift of life out of love. We see our disbelief reflected in Thomas. Like him, we too often see death as the last horizon and this is why we are afraid to donate our life. We have the instinct that tells us, "**Enjoy life because it will end sooner than you think**". It is what people who lived in ancient times had said when they suggested the 'carpe diem' - 'size the day' or what was on the floor of the pagan palaces '**Memento mori**'= remember that you are going to die. Therefore enjoy the present moment. The temptation to follow this path always exists in us. So when we see that the ultimate fate is death, we are afraid to follow the path proposed by Jesus: to donate our life to reach the fullness of life. "**I am the truth.**" **Truth is not a concept. It is his person who embodies the true God and the true man. There is a God who does not look like Jesus:** the severe, susceptible, righteous God that many still have in their mind & they adore him because they are happy with that concept ... this 'God' thinks like them. This god is not 'true', it's a lie. You have to forget about it. And the person who does not resemble Jesus is not a true person, he or she is unfinished because the true and perfect man is Jesus: he who loves without saving anything, the one who donates everything for the brother's life. This is the successful true man. "I am the life". Life is love. Is that compulsion that comes from the Spirit, from the divine life that leads you to save nothing when you can bring happiness to someone, even your enemy. This solemn statement of Jesus sounds very strange in our pluralistic society today that doesn't understand this self-presentation of Jesus as the only way to salvation. No other life proposal is despised! there are beautiful things in other religions, extraordinary gestures of love in those who belong to Buddhism, Islam... nobody denies this, but if we seek the fullness of light in God & in people, this light is found only in Jesus of Nazareth.

And now Jesus says, "If you knew me, you would have also known the Father. Actually, you have already known him & have seen him". This enigmatic statement of Jesus provokes Philip's question. He asks Jesus to be able to see the Father. **It is a deep longing of the human heart: to see God.** The psalms speak to us of this need to see the Lord. "**Come,**" says my heart, "**seek his face**" **Your face, Lord, do I seek!** (Ps 27:8) Or Ps 42 "**As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. When will I see the face of God?**" And this desire that is deep in the human heart provokes Philip's request: "**Show us the Father.**" His wish

corresponds to that of Moses who had asked to God “**show me your glory**” (Ex 33:18). **We are well made... we are made for infinity.** Qoheleth, the wise man, in chapter 3 says: “**God has set the infinite in the heart of man.**” If we are not aware of this, of the need for God, we will respond to this need by filling ourselves with pleasures, successes, goods, & satisfactions that will never be enough. And we’ll probably blame something we’re missing or someone about our dissatisfaction. No, it’s an illusion from which we must free ourselves. This is the need for God that we have deep in our hearts: to see the face of God. This is Philip’s question: “**Lord, show us the Father and this is enough for us.**” **Thomas did not know the way and he had it in front of him. Philip does not see the Father and he has him by his side. The Father’s face has been manifested in Jesus of Nazareth.** In fact, Jesus replies, “**Philip, I have been with you for so long and you still don’t know me? Who has seen me, has seen the Father.**” Jesus, the Son of God, has become man. He has come into our world. He has walked our streets, has passed through our cities, precisely to show us the face of God. That face that had been disfigured. People had put on that face infinity of masks that must be removed. “**Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father**”. **This words are the compendium of Christian revelation.** And Jesus continues: “the words that I say to you I did not say on my own; the Father who is in me, He is the One who does the works. Keep believing & if you don’t believe me, believe at least at my works!” **What works is Jesus referring to?** We will instinctively think of the miracles that he does and that prove the truth of his claims. **No**, these are not the works to which Jesus refers. It is as if Jesus said to his disciples: “You have the Scriptures available to you that progressively reveals this face of God that you have in fullness before your eyes”. Think of this face of God that begins to manifest in Scriptures and you will realize that now the full light has come, in continuity with this light that was already beginning to shine in the OT. **God is the Father of life. The Father’s works have always been love and the gift of life.** Is He not the Father of the poor, the defender of the orphans, the widows, the protector of the helpless refugees and migrants? Is it not the God who rejects the hypocritical worship of the temple and instead wants justice, sharing bread with the hungry, and dress the naked? He is the God who does not blame people for their mistakes, but saves them from their sins. God does not see the sin of man: he sees the good that exists in his sons & daughters, and when there is something that hurts his sons and daughters he purifies it. The book of wisdom in chapter 11 it is beautifully presented. “**God closes his eyes to the sins of men**” and seeks that they find the right way. He doesn’t get angry on them. He wants to free them & he closes his eyes. What a beautiful image. Also in the Book of Ben Sira it is written that “**God dissolves our sins like the sun melts the frost with its heat.**” And the beautiful Psalm 103, 12. “**As the dawn is far from sunset, so it takes our crimes away from us.**” Also Micah: “**God casts our sins into the sea.**” We who care so much about our weaknesses that amaze us, humiliate us... God sees the beauty within us. And this already in the Old Testament! This is the light of the beautiful face of God. He alone knows how to love. This same light shines fully on the face of Jesus. The prophet Jeremiah in chapter 21 says that “**God will no longer remember our sins.**” God who goes mad... **He remember everything except our sins.** Is not this light of the Old Testament that then prepares the splendid light of works made by Jesus which are fully in tune with the works of the Father? That’s why Jesus says, believe at least in the works that I do and that you see and

that are the works of the Father in heaven. “I assure you: whoever believes in me, will do the works that I do, and even greater works because I go to the Father.” **These works of the Father manifested in Jesus do no end with him.** Jesus says, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and even greater works.” Jesus lived in specific time, very limited, in a small place – Palestine is just about 20.000 square km. The manifestation of the Father’s works in Jesus ended with the life of Jesus. This is a great message. Now **the Father continues to manifest his works through his disciples.**