

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

Jesus was right. The disciples were deeply troubled and they needed to hear his words telling them not to worry. They had given up everything to follow him and their decision had paid off. He had given meaning and direction to their lives, the kind of meaning that gives the deepest peace and sense of security and wellbeing. They could live their lives with an all embracing sense of purpose and then suddenly Jesus told them that he was leaving them and that they could not follow him. They did not readily understand what Jesus meant but with the Last Supper and his arrest it became clear that he was referring to his death.

That distressing and frightening confusion and meaningless would have followed and suddenly all they would have seen in front of them was a cloudy sense of loss and hopelessness. It is, sadly, a common human experience when an event seems to destroy the framework and way of life that gave all meaning and security.

They were right to be distressed. After all the one who is the truth and the way to life had convinced them to follow him. All other experience faded into the shadows. They were quite rightly feeling bereft and their distress points to the truth that without Jesus there can be no life, no flourishing, no peace and no joy.

The story of our own time points to the same truth. Lacking any direction in life and living so often in fear so many of our brothers and sisters look in completely the wrong places for meaning and for something that makes sense of our lives. Those of us who live in this part of the city can testify that local supplies of heroine have been substandard because of the unusual behaviour recently and the abuse of drugs. If it is not drugs that so many mistakenly think will bring some kind of meaning then it may be sex and if that fails then there are all those things that money can buy like possessions, power and pleasure. Surely all these marvellous substances and things will bring us life and meaning. And then if it is not any of these to which people turn it will be a style of life or an organisation.

While, in one way or another, all these things are gifts from God, they are given to us not to be our reason for living but to lead us to our reason for life and our fulfilment who is the person of Jesus.

So we are given two apostles today with two questions. First there is Thomas. Jesus tells the disciples that they know the way to the place where he is going. Thomas quickly responds by agreeing that they know where he is going and ends with the question 'How can they know the way?' Yes, they know that Jesus has to return to his Father. With that knowledge they embrace the promise that the experience of Jesus finding life to the full with his Father is theirs as well. He is going to prepare a place and that place holds the assurance that with Jesus each of us will find that perfection of joy and life for which we yearn each day and for which we are created. But with Thomas we ask the question 'Yes okay, but how do we get there, what do we have to do?'

Jesus' answer shows clearly that getting to that fullness of life, which is Jesus' promise, is not about what we do, it is all about our relationship with Jesus 'I am the way, the truth and the life' is Jesus' answer to Thomas.

Jesus is the way. Jesus enters each of our lives, through baptism, confirmation and Eucharist in order to walk with us through life. His Holy Spirit is constantly working in us to make us more and more like Jesus and more part of him. All we have to do is to ensure that he is our priority, that we refer everything to him and that no plan, no

activity, no aspiration is more important than he is. Our lives must be built around Jesus and shaped around our prayer so that he can be our way to well being and flourishing.

Jesus is the truth. It is Jesus speaking to us in prayer and his word and message that provides the guidance and plan to lead us in the right direction. As the very blueprint of humanity and creation, Jesus is the means to becoming what God's intends us to be.

That is why he is the life. Eternal life, human life, life and joy to the full is found only in him. Anything else that purports to offer this can only be a pale and failing reflection.

Philip may have thought that he was one step ahead of Thomas. He had listened to Jesus and knew that sharing Jesus' relationship with his Father was the essence of life and joy. So he asks Jesus to show the Father so that they may enjoy complete satisfaction.

Philip's words elicit an impatient rebuke from Jesus "How can you say 'let us see the Father?' To have seen me is to see the Father." Yes, Jesus is the way, the truth and the life because he himself reveals and brings to us the person and love of God himself.

True Philip was able to see Jesus with his physical sight but we may legitimately ask the question "how can we see Jesus?"

We may not be privileged with a vision of Jesus given to our physical sight. But we can see the presence of Jesus as we look with our hearts and the eyes of faith. It is seeing Jesus with the eyes of faith in prayer, seeing his action in those works which bring healing and peace that will lead us to continue his work and bring us to attract others into relationship with him. It is his Spirit living within us that will lead and guide us to do even greater works.