

Easter 5 John 14:1-14

In these weeks of the season of Easter our gospel readings take us through parts of the scripture concerned with what will happen after Jesus' death. Either they are readings telling of events after the resurrection or like this morning they are texts relating to Jesus speaking before his death, to his disciples about what was to come.

The context of today's gospel is that Jesus is meeting with his disciples for one last time before his arrest and crucifixion. There is a long conversation in John's Gospel, and at one point, Jesus tells his disciples not to be worried or upset.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled," Jesus told them. "Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

In other words, Jesus knows how to get from Point A – this life – to Point B – eternal life. And Jesus also says that we know that way. There is wonderful comfort to be drawn from these words, the disciples must have felt it and we feel it today. It will come as no surprise that the beginning of today's gospel is often used as part of the funeral service. It is Jesus' assurance to his followers that although they are confused and worried there is a future beyond his death. We use it to remind us that there is a future for all of us where Christ has prepared a place for us.

But Thomas, the disciple who doubted, who has this wonderful gift of being practical, says, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" The answer Jesus gave was simple, and for centuries, Christians accepted it without question. "I am the way, the truth and the life," Jesus said. "No one comes to the Father, except through me." Great answer. But lately, some have begun to wonder is Jesus the way, or a way to God?

We live in a multicultural world. We must be tolerant of one another. People in our country speak different languages, come from different countries, and sometimes have different religious faiths. If we are going to get along we have to have respect for one another. But – some people look with unfavourably upon those of us who are Christians. And one reason may be that they view us as arrogant. People can be offended by Christians because we say we have the only way to God.

Well, aren't all of us offended when we meet people who say they have the only truth? Aren't we suspicious when we hear someone talk about how they have the truth and nobody else has the truth but them? How do we resolve that problem of arrogance? We may have loved ones and friends who are Jews. Or Muslims. Or Hindu. Or who have no faith at all. Or who are simply confused about their spirituality and have not yet taken the time or opportunity to make a decision about what they believe.

Jews are God's chosen people. The Bible says so. Therefore surely they are saved. Muslims worship the same God we worship. One of their bedrock principles says, "There is One God." Therefore surely anyone who worships the one God will be saved. Hindu, Buddhists, all of those folks seek to develop their spirituality. Won't God honour their search? And what about those people who live now, or lived in the past, who never knew the Gospel? What about people who simply haven't had the

opportunity to hear the gospel through no fault of their own – they don't believe it because they've never heard of it. What does this passage mean for all of them? And what about people who are just plain good and decent people? Doesn't that count for anything? The cornerstone of the Christian faith is that Christ died for our sins. In St. Paul's letter to the Romans, we read, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

The Bible teaches that people find their way to God in various ways. If there is one God and his existence and love for humanity is true then surely whatever others believe or choose not to believe, God still exists. I know I have a grey car, you may not believe that I own a grey car but that lack of faith in my car and its colour doesn't make it disappear. So if God exists, he exists in spite of what we believe and not because we believe.

But Jesus did not say, "No one comes to God except through me." What he told Thomas and all of us is, "No one comes to the Father except through me." Did you hear the difference? Jesus tells us in Matthew's Gospel that there will be a time when all people will end their journey and come face to face with God. Jesus puts it this way: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left."

Well, if all roads lead to God and that at the end of that road we find a judge, why say there is anything unique about Christ and Christianity? It all goes back to the New Testament lesson, in which Jesus was giving directions to Thomas about how to get from Point A to Point B -- How to get from this world to the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus did not say "No one comes to God except through me." He said, "No one comes to the Father except through me." If all roads lead to God, then at the end of that road we can face God our Father, or simply God our Judge. Now how do we become children of God? St. John said it plainly at the beginning of his Gospel: "to all who received Christ, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." (John 1:12-13).

Or as Jesus put it in today's New Testament lesson, "No one comes to the Father except through me." Whatever we understand about other faiths, what we have been taught as Christians is that there is a uniqueness about Christ that through his teaching and his sacrifice we become able to approach God as His children, and therein lies our Gospel hope.