

Fifth Sunday of Easter
John 14:1-12
Lectio Divina - May 9, 2020
--Brad Milunski, OFM Conv.

1. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.
2. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?
3. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.
4. And you know the way to the place where I am going."
5. Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"
6. Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.
7. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."
8. Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."
9. Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"
10. Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.
11. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.
12. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.
13. *[I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*
14. *If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.]*

This rich passage, so well-known from Catholic funeral liturgies, is both a consolation and a challenge. This Sunday's few verses are but a small part of John 13-17, a long section of the Fourth Gospel, in which Jesus gives a kind of last will and testament to his disciples and lifts them up in prayer to the Father before his hour of glory on the cross. Jesus has just washed the feet of his disciples in their last celebratory meal together, given Judas his leave to betray his Lord, and predicted Peter's triple denial in the verse immediately preceding our passage. These five chapters will conclude with Jesus' walk across the Kidron valley to the garden in which, unlike in the garden of our first parents, Jesus will calmly and resolutely give himself totally to his Father's will, to the betrayal and arrest which will require Jesus to love until the end.

After the scene becomes a bit bleaker—to say the least—toward the end of chapter 13, Jesus' words at the start of today's passage might seem a bit ironic: "Do not let your hearts be troubled." The irony is even more evident when we realize that the word Jesus uses in this gentle command is the same word used in John 13:21 in the scene with his betrayer: "Jesus was troubled in spirit..." It is the same word used in John 11:33 to describe Jesus being strongly disturbed and troubled upon seeing Lazarus' sister Mary and those who accompanied her weeping over the death of her brother and his friend. Is Jesus not following his own advice to his disciples and to us? Not at all. The distinction is, of course, that while you and I and even Jesus may dwell on this or that life experience as being true sources of emotional

disturbance, disquiet, and anxiety, Jesus' command in chapter 14, verse 1 is asking us to look at the bigger picture, life over the long haul. And that bigger picture of ultimate consolation and blessing is what Jesus unfolds for us in the verses that follow.

Two areas of focus will form the remainder of this reflection: the "dwelling places" of verse 2 and Jesus' self-identification as the "way, and the truth, and the life" in verse 6. While the verb meaning, "stay," "remain," or "dwell" is not an uncommon one in the New Testament, its over 30+ occurrences in the Gospel of John win the prize for frequency by far. We know that Andrew and another disciple of John the Baptist ask Jesus in chapter 1 where he is staying. Jesus doesn't answer their question directly but rather issues an invitation to follow him, and we are simply told in 1:39 that they did stay with him in a place not specifically named. The point of the anonymity is that the focus is on following Jesus and staying with him wherever he happens to be. Beyond a geographical location, we also learn in the gospel that the Spirit remains on Jesus (1:33) and that the Advocate will abide with us (14:16), that his word is a place where we can abide (8:31), and that we remain in him and he in us by consuming his flesh and blood (6:56). In Jesus' opponents, sin and blindness find a ready home in which to dwell as in the story of the man born blind (9:41), but we as his disciples are meant to live or remain in the light and not in darkness (12:46), stay as branches on the vine (15:5) so that we remain in his love (15:10). Our passage today unfolds the saving truth that the Father dwells in Jesus (14:10), and he dwells in the Father. It is to this dwelling place that Lord Jesus invites us: no longer the Temple of stone but his living Body, a place without borders or walls. Our security comes from being one with the saving will and works of God as revealed in the Word made flesh who dwells among us in his Risen life. In John's gospel we know that this indwelling is already bearing fruit in us by faith, and its consummation will come when the Lord Jesus returns to take us with him. All earthly powers and human states of emotional ups and downs pale in comparison to that promise which is sure because of the empty tomb.

"I am the way, the truth, and the life." Our contemporary world might bristle at the exclusive claim Jesus makes in his self-identification as the way, the truth, and the life—the Greek enables us to see readily that he does not say he is a way, a truth, or a life. It is not unlike Acts 4:12 where Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, reminds his curious listeners and us that there is no salvation in any other name. Jesus states quite categorically that "no one comes to the Father except through [him]." Our every experience, if it is to be seen from God's perspective, must be evaluated in light of Jesus, his works, and his end in glory. What we have learned from centuries of bloodshed and conflict, however, is that we are not first and foremost to run into battle armed with this truth as a weapon. Rather, with the example and witness of other disciples of Jesus, the hours of dwelling in God in prayer, and the works of love and justice that wash the feet of the poor—all that flows outward from God dwelling within us, the world is meant to be overcome by the contagious force of divine love revealed in the Word made flesh until our world becomes chronically infected by the presence of God who has come not to condemn but to save. The challenge of course is that this way, this truth, and the path to fullness of life involve our own embrace of our own hours of glory, our sharing in the crucified love of the One who has first shown us the way. Our remaining, dwelling, living with the Crucified and Risen One, and he with us, are the antidote to all disturbance, anxiety, and distress. This is the only way, the only truth that ultimately matters, and the experience of life through all the deaths through which we walk. The Risen Jesus says to us today: "Believe in me."