

May 7, 2023
5th Sunday of Easter
John 14:1-12

Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. Where I am going you know the way."

Thomas said to him, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said to him, "Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?' Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father.

Background:

This text begins a much larger section of John's Gospel often referred to as "The Last Discourse." It is an intimate address by Jesus to his disciples at the last supper before the crucifixion. Similar examples are found throughout the scriptures. The 49th chapter of Genesis records Jacob's farewell, Deuteronomy 31 to 33 records Moses' farewell, and Paul's farewell is found in chapter 20 of Acts. In general, these discourses begin with a prediction of approaching death, then offer encouragement to the speaker's disciples, and then exhort the disciples to pass on their instruction to others who will come later.

Here, Jesus is reassuring the disciples before his departure. He seeks to calm their fear by encouraging them to trust in God's protection. He does not disguise the reality of his impending departure, but reframes it in terms of going to prepare a place for them with God. He then tells them that when he returns, they (Jesus, the disciples, and God) will be reunited. It is ambiguous whether this reunion will be at the resurrection or in the final age.

This text, and John's Gospel in general, portrays Thomas as the one who questions Jesus and what he is trying to teach them. Philip, too, has a special relationship with Jesus in John's Gospel. He is one of the disciples that Jesus personally invites to be a follower, and he is the disciple responsible for bringing Nathaniel to Jesus (John 1:43-48). Jesus asked Philip how they might feed the multitude (John 6:5-9). When some Greeks came looking for Jesus, they approached Philip first. He and Andrew then took them to Jesus (John 12:20-22). When Philip asks Jesus to "Show us the Father" in verse 8, the question should be heard as coming from someone who has a special relationship with Jesus.

In this text, Jesus makes a rather bold statement that he (Jesus) is in the Father and the Father is in him. After 2,000 years of theological reflection, the contemporary Christian community may not find this kind of statement shocking. But for the early disciples, this was an extraordinary statement. In a kind of recognition of how difficult it may be to grasp what has just been stated, Jesus adds "or else, believe because of the works themselves [that I have performed]."

John's community would find consolation in this text. Since Jesus' ascension, they have experienced the death of some of their members. They have been expelled from the synagogue, the place that they believed to be the center of their relationship with God, their community, and their family. Lastly, the Christian community has begun to experience persecution for their faith in Jesus. Jesus' words would help them find a new center of

meaning in him, and assure them that they did, indeed, still have a place where they could gather together with him and with God.

Reflection Questions:

1. What are some of the ways you are experiencing absence of significant people in your life?
2. Given the transition taking place in society and in the early Christian community at the time, who are some of the people that the regular early Christians might be missing by the time John is writing this Gospel?
3. Now placing yourself back at the last supper, given how John describes both Thomas and Philip, how do you think Thomas and Philip were feeling as they heard Jesus speaking to them?
4. Jesus says to Philip: "Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip?" Read these words aloud until they seem to capture the emotion of Jesus' response to Philip. What comes across to you?
5. Thomas tells Jesus, "Master, we do not know where you are going, how we can know the way?" How do you hear these words today in your own life situation?
6. At the end of this text, Jesus says: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father." Do you believe that what Jesus says here is true? How is it true in your own life?
7. Can you take some time now to talk honestly with God about his words of reassurance to you in this Gospel? Or you might want to talk with God about the hope he has in you that you will do even greater things.

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com.

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for May 7, 2023, the Fifth Sunday of Easter

As the number of disciples grew, some widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. The Twelve called together the community and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to serve at table. Select from among you seven men filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task." So they chose Stephen, a man filled with faith and the Holy Spirit, also Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas of Antioch. The apostles prayed and laid hands on them. The word of God continued to spread, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly; even a large group of priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.
Exult, you just, in the Lord; give thanks to the Lord on the harp; chant his praises.
Upright is the word of the Lord, and all his works are trustworthy.
He loves justice and right; of the kindness of the Lord the earth is full.
See, the eyes of the Lord are upon those who fear him, upon those who hope for his kindness,
to deliver them from death and preserve them in spite of famine.

Beloved: Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, be built into a spiritual house to offer spiritual sacrifices to God. For it says in Scripture: Behold, I am laying a stone in Zion, a cornerstone, chosen and precious, and whoever believes in it shall not be put to shame. Its value is for you who have faith. But for those without faith: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, a stone that will make people stumble and fall. They stumble by disobeying the word, as is their destiny. You are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises" of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

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Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him."
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Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?
The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or believe because of the works themselves. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father."

Excerpts from Acts 6:1-7; Psalm 33:1-2, 4-5, 18-19; 1 Peter 2:4-9; and John 14:1-12