

Easter 5
5/14/2017

A SPOUSAL LOVE

Different cultures have different customs about marriage. Over time, these traditions evolve and in some cases may devolve. It's been said that in biblical times rather than an engagement there was an espousal. A celebration took place at the home of the bride's family and the couple was considered legally married although there was no shared married life. At the end before leaving, the man would say, *I am going to prepare a place for you and I will come back and take you to myself.* He would then return to his home and prepare the dwelling for himself and his wife and then when his father thought everything was ready, there would be the wedding.

That all sheds light on Jesus' words. It reminds us that the love of Jesus for his Church is a spousal love, the love of a husband for his wife. And marriage itself is an insight into the love of God.

It also sheds light to remember that this all takes place during the Last Supper as Jesus gives his last words to his disciples. *Do not let your hearts be troubled.* Jesus is saying this just before entering into his agony, passion and death. Do not let your hearts be troubled? Isn't that time to be troubled by all of this? This isn't some sort of naive optimism but rather is rooted in faith. The solution Jesus tells us comes from faith. Do not let your hearts be troubled because you have faith in me. To have faith is to believe, but to have faith is also to obey and also to trust. *You have faith in God. Have faith in me.*

This twofold faith is really one. For a Christian, to have faith in God is to have faith in Jesus. The door to the many dwelling places of heaven is faith. Faith is both believing and trusting. There's faith by which we believe and the faith in which we believe, the content. Both are important.

Not faith Jesus who is a nice guy or a good teacher but Jesus who is the eternal Son of the Father, Jesus who is the Word of God made flesh. Jesus who doesn't just show us the way to the Father but rather who shows us the Father. Jesus is the sacrament of the Father. He makes God present. He is truly God as well as truly human. Jesus is the human face of God.

Thomas asks Jesus the way. Thomas is looking for a map but the way isn't to be found in a map but in a man, in the person of Jesus. And Jesus doesn't just point the way but rather he is the way. Whenever Jesus says, *I Am*, there's more there than meets the eye. *I Am* is the Hebrew word for God so when Jesus says, I Am the resurrection, I Am the bread of life, *I Am* the way, the truth and the life, it is a declaration that he is truly God in addition to be truly human. Jesus is both the way and the destination, the way in terms of his human nature and the destination in terms of his divine nature.

The way of Jesus can be hard. It involves letting go of ourselves, the way of the Cross, the movement from life through death into new life that Jesus pioneers and in which we all follow. We don't do this alone but with others as part of the living stones that make up the Church St. Peter speaks of in the second reading. We travel this way together as part of a pilgrimage and as the first reading reminds us, there can be bumps in the road. People in church not getting along with each other. Imagine that. However, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we persevere and together, work towards a solution.

Jesus is the truth. We show we're his disciples by honesty to God, to others and to ourselves. In our words and in our actions. By that we know that it's not all right to lie, cheat or gossip. Not only that, lying and falsehood become heavy burdens that drain our emotional energy. Jesus is the truth and we show we're Christians by lives marked with truth.

When you come down to it, every sin is a violation of truth. For example, to steal is to violate the truth of what belongs to another; to commit idolatry is to violate the truth of who God is. Our lives are to be governed not by what we like or don't like but by what is true. Many people today don't want to believe that there is objective truth because truth makes demands of us.

Sometimes this is called the dictatorship of relativism. What's true for you isn't what's true for me. To deny objective truth doesn't merely deny what is, it is to propose something dangerous. Without objective truth, our rights and even our lives are subject to danger. The door is open to tyranny and those who suffer the most will be the poorest and weakest. History is filled with examples of what happens when the truth of another person's humanity is denied, whether it has to do with race or ethnic group; being pre-born or terminally ill; severely disabled or perhaps even being

just plain inconvenient. Truth can make life more difficult but in the end it can make it better.

Jesus is the life. He calls us from the death of sin to the newness of eternal life. We celebrate and taste this life at every Eucharist and that some children of our parish will share in for the first time this morning. To follow Jesus is to reverence human life and work on its behalf and to value the new life that flows from Christ.

Immediately after saying these beautiful words about being the way, the truth and the life, Jesus adds some more disturbing words. *No one comes to the Father except through me.* Jesus isn't just the way, he's the only way. As Christians we pray for the welfare and salvation of every person on the face of the earth, we seek to love and serve them but our hope is always tied to the truth that Jesus came to save.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. The love of Christ for his Church is a spousal love. May our faith in Jesus, which is itself a gift, calm our hearts when we are restless and give courage when we are afraid. Jesus is the way that leads to the Father, the truth that sets us free and the life that is eternal. With lives of intentional faith, together may we walk in that way, follow in that truth and live the life that is his gift to us as we wait for the time he will take us to himself.