

EASTER SUNDAY V "A"

MAY 10, 2020

As we continue our journey through these weeks of social distancing, sheltering in place, accompanied by fears and anxieties of various kinds, Jesus' words in the Gospel are most comforting. ***"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"*** (Jn.14).

Jesus addresses these words to his disciples immediately following the Last Supper. The events of his agony in the garden, arrest, trial, conviction, crucifixion, death, and burial are already in motion. Jesus is physically in his earthly human nature going away. As he departs he offers words of **invitation, reassurance, hope** and **promise** to his disciples.

INVITATION. Jesus invites the disciples to still deeper personal relationship with him. Like the apostle Thomas Jesus is inviting the disciples enter into him, his own "in dwelling/abiding/living in" the heart and love of his Father/God—an expansive heart and life knowing no boundaries of time or space.

REASSURANCE. Next Sunday as we continue reflecting on this discourse of Jesus will tell his disciples that his leaving will not leave them "orphans"; abandoned and alone in the world.

HOPE and **PROMISE.** After assuring the disciples that he has gone to prepare a place for them and will not leave them orphans Jesus promises that he will give the disciples another "Advocate" to be with them always, "the Spirit of truth."

While situated following the Last Supper in the Gospel of John, this "Farewell Discourse" of Jesus are placed on these Sundays preceding the celebrations of the Ascension and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Given our present circumstances these words of Jesus take on an immediacy for our daily life that perhaps they have not done before.

When we reflect on Jesus' promise of going to "prepare a place for us" our thoughts naturally turn to heaven. Being bodily physical beings we tend to think or imagine heaven as a "place" somewhere "up there" or "out there." We imagine streets of gold and pristine white robes, angels playing harps, a reunion with all our family members and others who have departed

from us through death. When it comes to heaven the Bible does not give us exact details. Instead, Jesus when speaking about the “Kingdom of God/Heaven” and John the author of the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, both employ allegory and metaphor.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, in one of his writings, reminds us that the words of Jesus in today’s gospel about heaven are not about some physical “place”. Rather, heaven is a state of living, of being in relationship with Jesus in the here and now of today, and of knowing Jesus’ relationship of love in the midst of whatever circumstances life finds us in now. Saint Paul in the eighth chapter of his letter to the Romans after listing a variety of sufferings that can confront a believer concludes, ***“There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”*** (Rm. 8). Heaven is already here through faith even as we await the fullness of the transformation of our bodies and world on that day when Christ returns and hands over all of redeemed creation to the Father. This is the picture of heaven Jesus draws; not about a future place of welcome ready to welcome us when we die. Heaven for Jesus is a relationship, a home, an in dwelling, an abiding, that welcomes us both now and then.

These days of Easter are a powerful reminder that the resurrection is not an event of a long ago past, not a promissory note for some future reality but a daily experience for the follower of Jesus. Resurrection is not just something we anticipate but something we participate in now, even in the midst of these days of uncertainty, suffering, sickness and death. It’s a vision intended not only to comfort and reassure us, but a vision and promise to spur us into action right here and right now because God is already moving amongst us.

Thomas said to Jesus, “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” (Jn. 14).

May it be so for us.

10 May, 2020
Father Jim Secora