

Easter 5 - A - 2

Acts 6:1-7; 1 Peter 2:4-9; Jn 14:1-12

Jesus says *In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. ... I am going to prepare a place for you.* Given how long we have all been cooped up in the house we may want to take him up on that. With all the things that we can worry about, it's good to know that Jesus has a plan - and is leading us to a better place. Sometimes though, we can look only so far as what we already know, and not even realize that something better is ahead for the one who follows Jesus.

In my years working with inner city youth I met a lot of kids. Many of them were looking for more, but what many of them really wanted was just more of what they already had. More power coming from violence, more money coming from dangerous activities, and a deeper connection to an environment and lifestyle that was eating them alive. You could talk to them of something different - but many just couldn't see it. You could say that there is a life that does not involve all that they already knew - and they would laugh at you. Some hoped that something like this had to be possible and they listened. I recently spoke to two of my former clients, both of whom I met when they were teenagers, but now are men in their 30's. They had both been to jail or prison at some point, and were both out. One spoke with excitement about all of the old days. About all the rough scrapes, remembering the times that I came to visit him in jail, or laughing about dodging a bullet - literally. A couple of months later I got a call from the other guy. He was saying that the things he always believed didn't make sense anymore, he was looking forward to where he wanted to be someday, and was talking a lot about religion and faith. He was saying that maybe the things that he and his buddies talked about when they were counting their drug money, and all the false ideas he had should be reexamined - there must be something more. I learned a couple months ago that the first young man is back in prison, and that the second has just got his first legal job. One aiming for more of the same, one entering an uncharted area with hope.

When Jesus tells his disciples that he is going to prepare place for them, they can't look beyond what they already know, they can't see past what they have already experienced. Like the first young man, they think that the way to happiness and fulfillment is found in larger amounts of what they already have. We too can get locked in that cycle and continue to aim for more of what we already have - and like that first young man - that is all we will get. But Jesus is calling them and us to something different. He is calling them to follow him to a new place - a place that they have not seen - a place that they and we cannot even imagine. In order to get to

this final destination, in order to share in that wonderful fulfillment in heaven, we have to follow Jesus. But you may say “well I think that if you believe in God and are a good person then it really doesn’t matter what religion you are or if you even follow all that Jesus said.” Jesus disagrees. He says: *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* Last week he tells us he is the gate, and today he says he is the “way” - in other words, the road. He shows us the path to take - but more than that, he is the road itself. We are called to become physically one with Jesus, to let him show the path - and to let him be the path, not to build our own way - our own road, our own path - apart from Jesus. This leads nowhere.

In our second reading Peter says: *like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* We go to the Father “through” Jesus literally. As those Baptized and joined to his Body, we go to the Father through Jesus because we become part of that Body that is one with the Father. The Baptized share in his priesthood by offering at the altar our own spiritual sacrifices, and we also share as members of his body in the mission to bring peace and justice to the world. We heard in the first reading the lack of peace in the early Christian community. We see people clinging to older ways of selfishness, of greed, of divisions, of looking down on people because of their origins or nationality - it was tearing the community apart. This is not the Body of Jesus in action. We see the first Deacons being appointed, and the focus of the community shifts to the preaching of God’s way - a way that is Jesus himself who is the *way, the truth, and the life.*

Jesus has prepared a place for each of us - both in his body here on earth and a place in God’s presence in heaven. We act as his Body in this life when we renounce the way of life that brings unfairness, greed, and division - we become one with Jesus when we join Jesus in his role as priest by worshiping and offering sacrifice in church, and we join Jesus in his mission when we show love and help to our neighbors. The second young man I told you about wants to know what is the way, the accurate truth - the path to a better life. The more we enter on that same search, the more we may just appreciate the treasure that we have before us. The truth of God’s revelation, the presence of Jesus physically in the Eucharist, access to the altar of sacrifice, and the presence of the other members of that Body around us as we make the greatest journey of all - a mission to lift up this broken world by our sacrifice to God and our actions of charity. We will do greater things - all of us throughout time joined to Jesus - than he did in three short years on Earth. The better I get at this - and I still work at it every day - the more peace I have. Not only does Jesus have place prepared in the future, but I see how he is supporting now all of those in his Body who follow him in this life ... heading to the place he has prepared for us in the next.