

**Rev. Kevin V. Madigan**  
**Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel-St. Thomas More, NYC**  
**May 10, 2020 Streaming Mass**  
**Fifth Sunday of Easter Year A John 14:1-12**

In today's Gospel we hear Jesus say to His disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me." These are certainly comforting words in these troubled times. And, more than words, Jesus goes on to tell us how this is possible. He says, "In My Father's house, there are many dwelling places." These words are often understood as referring to heaven, as a place that will have room for all different kinds of people. In that light, I often find people at the time of the death of a loved one, inclined to pick this particular passage to be read at the Funeral Mass, especially if the deceased was not very observant in the practice of their faith. Certainly, no one should underestimate the mercy of God. Better to be judged by God, than by another human being, even by ourselves. Jesus is not speaking here just of some place we can look forward to going in the future. He is speaking of a reality, of a relationship with God that begins now, which endures beyond the grave, which not even the jaws of death can destroy.

In the opening chapter of St. John's Gospel, the very first words addressed to Jesus by two would-be disciples are, "Where are you staying?" It seems a straightforward enough question like, "Where do you live," "Where is your house located?" But, as so often in St. John's Gospel, there is another meaning, a deeper meaning, a meaning still hidden to the questioners, but which will become apparent as they come to "know" Jesus. The question is implying not where, but in Whom Jesus stays, abides, remains, dwells, rests, in Whom is Jesus grounded; where is the Source of the life that Jesus will offer to the two questioners and to all those who come after. And the response of Jesus to their question as to where He lives is, "Come and see." The whole Gospel of St. John, then, is an invitation to explore what is the bond that Jesus has with the One whom He calls "Father," and how we who are His disciples can share even now in that bond. The question is actually not about a place, but about a relationship.

So, when Jesus says, "I am going to prepare a place for you...so that where I am you also may be." He is not saying that He is going up to the celestial mansions to get the rooms ready, so that they will have a place to go when they die." He is saying that now that His earthly ministry is ending, He is returning to the One Whom He calls "Father," the One in Whom He abides, the One in Whom He rests, the One in Whom He is grounded, the One Who is the Source of all He said and did. And as a result of His return to the Father, they (we) can have what He has, that same life-giving

relationship with God Who is the very source of Life and the essence of Love. Jesus is speaking about what it means to live in the conscious awareness of God's presence, of the Love that is God coming into one's mind and heart to displace all the negativity, fear and hate that may reside there. That is 'eternal life,' a relationship with God that begins even now, that is life-fulfilling, and that endures beyond the limits of space and time. It is what St. Catherine of Siena meant when she said, "All the way to heaven is heaven."

But how do we get to that place in our lives, how do we develop that relationship? Jesus presents Himself as the unique guide when he says, "I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life." One might say of Jesus that He is God's "window" upon our world. There is a certain transparency about Him, in that we catch a sense of what God is like by looking at all that Jesus said and did. The invisible God is made visible in the life of Jesus. We might say also that Jesus is the corrective to how we human beings develop our own mistaken notions of God. Too often we create our notion of God in the image of ourselves, imposing on God our exclusivism, elitism, favoritism, and judgmentalism. But Jesus says, "Look at Me. Is that what I am like? Of course not, and neither is God." The challenge to faith is to accept not only that Jesus is God, but that God is like Jesus.

Jesus says to Philip, "Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father." He is telling Philip (and us, too) to reinterpret all our narrow, tribal, chauvinistic, elitist views of God in light of what Philip (of what we) have seen in Himself. And because Jesus was all about compassion, about healing, about fairness, about inclusion, about love, so God is also all about the very same things. When we dwell in His Father's house, when we have that same relationship with God that Jesus has, we are about those same things as well. These are the values that characterize our lives, rather those transactional ones that treat people as means to an end, that are quick to make deals, sacrificing principles for profit, and that see expediency as the path to success.

Jesus concludes that passage we have just read by saying, "Whoever believes in Me will do the works that I do, and will do greater than these, because I am going to the Father." Now is the time to do just that. We have been living under quarantine for almost two months. Hopefully we come out of that experience better than when we entered in. Hopefully we have become more aware of our vulnerability, of our mortality, and of our interconnectedness with one another. More aware of the injustices in our society wherein people of color have inadequate access to health care and a supply of quality food, more aware of the disparity of income forcing the poor to greater exposure to COVID-19, and more aware of the inverted values of our society wherein we stockpile nuclear weapons, but not the basic medical equipment to

prepare for the sort of pandemic we are now living through---a modern-day "Maginot Line" of faulty defense against a real, but ignored danger.\*\* St. Teresa of Avila once said that in the world today, "Jesus has no hands but ours, no arms but our, no legs but ours." We are the ones who continue His work. Let us pray that, having become more aware, and empowered by the gift of His Spirit, we can meet the challenges+ ahead of us.

\*\*The Maginot Line was a line of fortifications erected by the French after World War I on their northeastern border with Germany to prevent any future invasion. It proved ineffective when Nazi Germany avoided the barrier, invading France through Belgium.