

10 May 2020

Fifth Sunday of Easter

1 Peter 2:4-9; John 14:1-12

Sometimes this Gospel text gets translated, “In my Father’s House there are many mansions,” and this reference to mansions has formed some Christian imaginations like the one who thought up **this joke**: So, there’s this fellow who was a great fan of the Minnesota Vikings and who, sadly, died. At the pearly gates, St. Peter welcomed him and escorted him to his mansion which was decorated in Purple, white and yellow and had horns coming out the side windows. The Viking fan was thrilled. St. Peter then invited him on a walk through the neighborhood to see all the beautiful mansions. About three blocks away, he saw a house about the same size as his but decorated in green and gold with a big Packer G on the garage door. “Who lives here,” the man asked. “Jesus,” St. Peter said.

However, scholars tell us that the Gospel text doesn’t actually refer to mansions or big houses but rather tells us generally that **there are many places to dwell, to abide, to stay, with God**. I’ve often been touched by the language of Psalm 27 that speaks of the longing to dwell in the house of God, so to hear the language of many places instead of one place challenges my imagination (which is good).

It made me think of the many dwelling places, many places where I can be, where I can be and abide in God, confident in God’s presence, and knowing that all places have this potential because God is everywhere. I thought of this church, for sure, but also of mountain trails with views of glacial peaks. I thought of my prayer corner at the rectory where I have been celebrating mass during these days of physical distance.

Then I thought about you. You celebrating this mass with me from your many dwelling places. From your homes you seek to abide with God and God’s People in this new way of celebrating mass. You’ve invited the Lord into your home. Can you see it as a place where he dwells? One thing the Church has been teaching for years is that the homelife of families is meant to be Church on a small scale; we call it the “**domestic church**.” For Christians, the home is meant to be the place where God is honored in prayer and also in the love and support, and frequent forgiveness that can happen in a home.

I had a lovely conversation with a family while looking over the young boy’s workbook to earn a religious scouting award. He was supposed to give an example of a time he was obedient and listened well to his parents. But what he wrote was something like “I tried to listen and obey, but I didn’t and I felt real bad. So, **I tried again, and I just couldn’t do it.**” So, in one sense, not a success story, but in another sense a wonderful success story at attempt after attempt to love well and forgiveness for failings. That’s a domestic church. And for people like me who live alone, we can still make our homes places where God lives and we abide with God because we pray there and we desire there to be good. These are good days to claim and remember that Where you are is Holy, because that’s where you are. The Church in its deepest sense isn’t these bricks and mortar—it’s you, as we heard in the Second Reading, who are the “**Living Stones**.” --“Let yourself be built up into a spiritual house.”

God dwells with us and we are called to dwell with God. One reason Jesus emphasizes this so much is **so that we will not be afraid of whatever life brings**. In the words of today’s Gospel, that our heart might not be troubled. “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me.” You know when he says this? It’s the night he will be betrayed and arrested and the eve of his crucifixion and death. It’s not just everyday wisdom he’s trying to pass on here, but something they will need when

their world falls apart in the very near future. Does that sound maybe super appropriate for our times? He's trying to give them **a way to stay peaceful and confident in the midst of things falling apart and change they do not welcome.** –to stay close to him.

I talked to one of our parishioners, Bill, on the phone recent. I knew when I called that he is dying of cancer. I said, "So, Bill, how are you doing?" He said rather gleefully, "Well Father, there's no hope, but that's OK!" Man, I thought, that's faith. I want that. How do we get that untroubled heart that Jesus wants us to have?

People have their own strategies, I suppose, and for many it's a grace prepared for by years of faithful habits. It takes practice. **One thing I do**, one practice I have, when there is a troubling circumstance is to ask myself, "What's the worst case scenario?" And there can be some pretty scary scenarios that we can dream up. Maybe with this virus, getting it or having a loved one get it, perhaps dying. Losing work, financial stress beyond belief. Try to imagine that, and then realize that God is still there with you. Even when your world is falling apart, God won't let you fall apart. Even in the worst case scenario, God will raise you up...that's what we just celebrated at Easter.