

ctkAlive! Scripture Study
Easter Season 2020—A Cycle Readings
Session 5—“I am the way, the truth, and he life”



Note: For your convenience and to broaden your benefit from this and all sessions in this series, we have added links to books, authors, and other references mentioned in the text.

Caution: Links to the internet are like rabbits dashing across a hunter's path. Instinct says, "Leave the reflection and chase after that link!" Instead, we suggest waiting until you have followed the entire reflection. Then take all the time you wish to follow these interesting and educational links.

Opening Prayer Source: [The London Oratory](#)

Prayer to Our Lord for the Grace of Healing and Protection

Lord Jesus Christ, you travelled through towns and villages curing every disease and illness.

At your command, the sick were made well.

Come to our aid now, in the midst of the spread of the corona virus, that we may experience your healing love.

Heal those who are sick with the virus. May they regain their health and strength.

Heal us from our fear, which prevents neighbors from helping one another.

Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to a disease that knows no borders.

Good Lord, healer of all, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow.

May those who have died from the virus rest in peace and rise in glory.

Be with the families of those who are sick or have died.

As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair.

Be with doctors, nurses, and researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those afflicted, putting themselves at risk in the process. May they know your protection and peace.

Be with the leaders of all nations. Give them the foresight to act with prudence and charity for the well-being of the people they are meant to serve.

Stay with us, Lord, and grant us your peace.

Amen

5th Sunday of Easter Themes

A major theme of the liturgical readings during this fifth week of Easter is *placing our trust in God*.

We tend to think of all the earliest Christian communities as living up to the ideals set forth in Acts 2: 42-46:

“They were faithful to the teaching of the apostles, the common life of sharing, the breaking of bread and the prayers. . . . All the believers lived together and shared all their belongings. They would sell their property, and all they had, and distribute the proceeds to others, according to their need. Each day, they met together, in the temple area; they broke bread in their homes; they shared their food, with great joy and simplicity of heart.”

The first reading (Acts 6: 1-7), however, depicts the difficulty and hazards of living the Christian ideal every day and night of the week. Sadly, it was not and is still not the case.

St. Luke (author of Acts) portrays how reality set in, especially as the Jerusalem communities grew rapidly larger and the Jesus Movement within Judaism spread across the region.

Unrest arose because the Hellenists’* widows were being slighted in favor of the native Hebrew widows. The *twelve* apostles (Mathias had just been chosen to replace Judas Iscariot—see Acts 1: 3-26) met and prayed for guidance from the Holy Spirit. Their solution was to establish the order of diaconate as a ministry of material service within the community. The stated mission of those first seven deacons was to see to the equal care of *all* widows in their communities (similar to our present St. Vincent de Paul Society).

To set this week’s Gospel reading (John 14: 1-12) in time, we are transported back to the Last Supper. There, we find ourselves in the upper room. Like the other apostles and attendees (probably both men *and* women), all those present are part of Jesus’ inner circle of close friends and companions. Like all those gathered together, Thomas is enjoying the intimacy of the evening. Does he comprehend that this night will mark their community’s final supper with their master and Lord? Probably not, no matter how many hints Jesus gave during the run-up to Passover and during the meal itself.

Everything changes when Jesus identifies Judas as his betrayer. The mood in the room becomes heavy with bewilderment and unasked questions. Tempers fray at the knowledge that one of their own could sell Jesus’ life for a pocketful of cash!

This passage resembles a living “last will and testament.” Jesus seems to speak in riddles—calling himself the way, the truth, and the life. Still in a state of shock, Thomas just can’t handle any more metaphors. He craves plain talk from Jesus. Unless he “gets it,” he can’t be satisfied.

At times, Thomas appears to us as brash (“in your face,” we might call it today).

This night, he's having trouble with Jesus' statement, "You *know* the way where I am going." He blurts out, "Lord, we"—meaning himself primarily—"don't know where you are going; how can we know the way?"

Jesus takes a deep breath. There is no easy way to explain his meaning. He can only speak of reality . . . and hope his intimate followers will accept it on his word. He answers, "I am the *way*, the *truth*, and the *life*." For now, that is all he can offer—but it's *everything*!

* 'Hellenists' mentioned here were Diaspora Jewish converts and moved to Jerusalem from various parts of the region. In Jerusalem, they joined the Jesus Movement. So, in the capital there was not one community but two. The new deacons Stephen and Philip seem to have led the Hellenist groups.—See "The Hellenists" at <http://www.helsinki.fi/teol/pro/merenlah/oppimateriaalit/text/english/follower.htm>

First Reading: From the Acts of the Apostles (6:1-7)

"In those days, as the number of disciples grew, the so-called 'Hellenists' complained against the so-called 'Hebrews,' because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

"So the Twelve summoned the whole body of disciples together, and said, 'It is not right, that we should neglect the word of God to serve at tables. So, friends, choose from among yourselves seven respected men, full of Spirit and wisdom, that we may appoint them to this task. As for us, we shall give ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.'

"The whole community agreed; and they chose Stephen,* a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit; Philip,** Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenus and Nicolaus of Antioch, who was a proselyte.

They presented these men to the apostles, who, first prayed over them, and then, laid hands upon them. The word of God continued to spread, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly; and even many (*Jewish*) priests accepted the faith."

* See Acts 6: 8ff

** See Acts 8: 4-8 and 8: 26ff

NOTE: It may seem strange that, Acts does not focus on the deacons in their primary ministry of hands-on care for the widows and others in need of material help in the community. Instead, St. Luke portrays Stephen and Philip as preachers and teachers. Over the centuries of the first millennium, the diaconate became linked to priesthood as a step toward final ordination and fell away as a separate way of living Christian life and ministry.

Pope Paul VI restored the permanent diaconate in 1967, following the close of the Second Vatican Council. If you are interested in reading the pope's decree of establishment, press Ctrl+(double)Click [here](#).

Personal Reflection

The ministry of deacon resulted from a failure to care for foreign and domestic widows equally. That early in its history, the young Church was in danger of splitting in two. We can understand this because we are at a crisis moment within our own Catholic Church

— *Whether I identify as a “conservative” Catholic or a “liberal/progressive” Catholic, what lesson on community vs. divisiveness can I draw from today’s first reading? Without yielding my principles, how might the Risen Christ expect me reach out in tolerance as a peacemaker within the entrenched factions of my parish community?*

— *With so many Catholics now withdrawing from active parish and Church life, why do I remain faithful to my admittedly imperfect parish and to my worldwide community?*

— *What is it that keeps me faithful, especially to Mass attendance and Eucharist, despite the awareness of actions I disapprove of and even condemn?*

Antiphonal Psalm (33: 1-2, 4-5, 18-19)

NOTE: This psalm is just too beautiful/powerful to abbreviate, so let’s reflect on the entire text.

A joyful song to the Creator: the national hymn of thanksgiving

Rejoice in Yahweh, you who are just.
praise is fitting for the upright.
Give thanks to him on the harp and lyre,
making melody and chanting praises.
Amid loud shouts of joy, sing to him a new song
and play the ten-stringed harp.
For upright is Yahweh’s word and worthy of trust is his work.
Yahweh loves justice and righteousness;
the earth is full of his kindness.

The heavens were created by his word,
the breath of his mouth formed their starry host.
He gathered the waters of the sea into a heap
and stored the deep in cellars.
Let the whole earth fear [*revere*] Yahweh;
let the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.

For he spoke and so it was, he commanded,
and everything stood firm.
Yahweh frustrates the plans of the nations
and brings to nothing the peoples' designs.
But his plan stands forever, and his heart's design,
through all generations.

Blessed is the nation whose God is Yahweh—
the people he has chosen for his inheritance.
Yahweh looks down from heaven
and sees the whole race of mortals.
From where he sits, he watches
all those who dwell on the earth—
he who fashions every heart, observes all their deeds.

A king is not saved by a powerful army,
nor a warrior rescued by his great strength.
Don't think that a horse will save you;
its great strength does not assure victory.
But Yahweh's eyes are upon those who fear him,
upon those who trust in his loving kindness,
to deliver them from death and preserve them from famine.
In hope, we wait for Yahweh, for he is our help and our shield.

Our hearts rejoice in him,
for we trust in his holy name.
O Yahweh, let your love rest upon us,
even as our hope rests in you.

Personal Reflection

The psalmist cries out, "Amid loud shouts of joy, sing to him a *new* song."

— *What song do I sing when I pray? Does God keep getting my old song again . . . and again? How might I give God a break and refresh my "prayer stream" with a "new song"?*

"Blessed is the nation whose God is Yahweh."

American Catholics are citizens of a country that proudly claims, "In God we trust."

— *How would I grade my nation on how we live by that motto?*

— *How would I grade myself on that same claim? At what point do I tend to take over and trust myself first . . . God second?*

The psalmist chides his nation for its misplaced priorities:

“A king is not saved by a powerful army, nor a warrior rescued by his great strength. Don’t think that a horse will save you; its great strength does not assure victory.”

— *Who or what do I rely on as a first resort?*

— *When I feel threatened in some way, how likely am I to rely first on my own “powerful army,” my “warrior,” my “warhorse” to keep me safe? How comfortable am I with resorting to God as my “first resort” when my life feels off-kilter?*

Second Reading: From the First Letter of St. Peter (2: 4-9)

“(Christ) is the living stone, rejected by people, but chosen by God, and precious to him; set yourselves close to him, so that, you, too, become living stones, built into a spiritual temple, a holy community of priests, offering spiritual sacrifices that please God, through Jesus Christ.

“Scripture says: ‘See, I lay in Zion a chosen and precious cornerstone; whoever believes in him will not be disappointed [Isaiah 28:16].’ This means honor, for you who believed, but for unbelievers, also the stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and it is a stone to stumble over, a rock which lays people low. They stumble over it, in rejecting the word, but the plan of God is fulfilled in this.

“You are a chosen race, a community of priest-kings, a consecrated nation, a people God has made his own, to proclaim his wonders. For he called you from your darkness to his own wonderful light.”

Personal Reflection

“The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and it is a stone to stumble over, a rock which lays people low.”

— *When in my life did God ever call me “from my darkness to wonderful light”?*

— *Looking back over my own recent and/or distant past, at what point(s) in my life did I reject the “cornerstone” I had in hand, in favor of a glitzier stone . . . that turned out in the end to be just an ordinary rock?*

(I may need to set my imagination/recall on “high alert,” not forcing easy answers but letting the truth surface. This may be something to journal about.)

Peter states that by baptism “you are a community of priest-kings.”

— *Hearing that, do I conclude that Peter was referring only to the special vocation of ordained priesthood, as we know it today? If so, what is my understanding about something we hear a lot since the Second Vatican Council called “priesthood of the laity”?*

NOTE: If you would like to study this further, you might like the online article in [“Simply Catholic.”](#) Also, an *America Magazine* article, [“Why the Catholic Church Needs Two Different Kinds of Priesthood.”](#)

Gospel Proclamation from the Gospel of St. John (14: 1-12)

“ ‘Do not be troubled! Trust in God and trust in me! In my Father’s house there are many rooms; otherwise, I would not have told you that I go to prepare a place for you. After I have gone and prepared a place for you, I shall come again and take you to me, so that where I am, you also may be. Yet you know the way where I am going.’ ”

“Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we don’t know where you are going; how can we know the way?’

“Jesus said, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me. If you know me, you will know the Father also; indeed you know him, and you have seen him.’

“Philip asked him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and that is enough.’

“Jesus said to him, ‘What! I have been with you so long and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever sees me sees the Father; how can you say, “Show us the Father”? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? All that I say to you, I do not say of myself. The Father who dwells in me is doing his own work.

“ ‘Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. At least, believe it on the evidence of these works that I do. Truly, I say to you, the one who believes in me will do the same works that I do; and he will even do *greater* than these, for I am going to the Father. Everything you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. Indeed, anything you ask, calling upon my name, I will do it!’ ”

Personal Reflection

— *How literally do I take those last four words, “I will do it”? If Jesus wasn’t exaggerating, what about the list of things I’ve asked for that Jesus hasn’t done for me?*

— *How would I have felt, if I'd been one of those present when Judas fled the upper room? Would I have said, "Good riddance?" or rather something like, "_____ (fill in) _____."*

— *If I had been at the Last Supper, what would my first thought have been, when I heard Thomas blurt out in frustration, "Lord, we don't know where you are going; how can we know the way?"*

Would it have been, "Thank you, Thomas. I have the same question!" or "Thomas, are you that dumb?" Or "_____ (fill in) _____."

Journaling Prompts

Take some time to write about the insights gained from reflecting on the 5th Sunday of Easter readings.

— *What is the first thought that comes to mind?*

We can't just be "takers" of God's good gifts. We need to be "givers," too.

— *How do I respond to what I've discovered in today's Scriptures? What difference will they make in how I think and live—and give back—during the week ahead?*

Questions

Feel free to send any questions or comments you might have to ctkAlive@ctkph.org

Preview of Next Session 6th Sunday of Easter Season

Acts 8: 5-8, 14-17 Deacon Philip instructs the curious Ethiopian official.

Psalms 66: 1-3, 4-7, 16, 20 A thanksgiving proclamation: "All the earth bows down to you, making music, in praise of you, singing in honor of your name."

I Peter 3: 15-18 "Keep your conscience clear."

John 14: 15-21 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

For Viewing/Listening

Song: "[I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life](#)" by [Bob Hurd](#)

Meditation: "[A Grateful Day](#)," with Brother [David Steindl-Rast](#)
(One of my all-time YouTube favorites!—AJG)

Closing Prayer Source: [Liturgy](#)
New Zealand

(adapted for use here)

Eternal God,
your Son Jesus Christ
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God now and forever . . . is the way,
the truth and the life for all creation.
Grant me grace to walk in his way,
to rejoice in his truth,
and to share his risen life.
Amen.

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Bishop Myriel: In His Own Words
(follow the link above)