

5TH SUNDAY OF EASTER - A
“One in us...”

Two very distant but related things happened last Friday. One made the evening news. The other went totally unnoticed. Pope Benedict XVI spoke before the United Nations and said that if there is ever to be peace in the world, he called for the powerful nations to treat all people with dignity. He was simply proclaiming the gospel of Jesus. In a quiet room in Hallmark Manor here in Federal Way, I visited a parishioner who is in the long, slow process of dying. His lungs are giving out, and each breath is becoming more labored. He looked at me with anxious eyes, so I spoke to him the words of today’s gospel, *“Do not you heart be troubled.”* He had a good heart. After I had given him Holy Communion, he closed his eyes. He seemed at peace, like, for the moment, his heart was no longer troubled, so I left. What an amazing person Jesus truly is. His words are meant equally for the powerful and weak, for all of humanity and for a single soul. At the same time, they challenge and comfort.

Rumors were going around that Jesus would be leaving his disciples and they were scared to death at the thought of it. He reassures them by saying he is going to prepare a place for them. He trusts his disciples will follow him because they know the way. But, as Thomas makes clear, they don’t know where he is going so how could they know the way? The answer Jesus gives them is extraordinary. While they were thinking in terms of directions, like on a road map or something, Jesus tells them the he is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The Way to the Father is to live in union with Jesus. That’s the way that works!

This reminds me of the time I was in Europe with my parents back in 1971. We got to the outskirts of Paris in our rental car at 5 o’clock

Friday afternoon. Traffic was impossible. I didn't know how to get to the AVIS drop off place on the Champs-Elysees, some five miles away. Then I got an idea. I'd hire a cab, and send it to the AVIS location and follow it in our car. Dad would ride in the taxi with mom in our back seat. The cabbie, of course, didn't speak English and I didn't speak French, so I showed him the AVIS rent-a-car address and hoped for the best. We started off on a round-a-bout, and immediately a truck got between us. I saw where the cabbie turned and got on his tail and never left it. Dad kept looking out the back window to see if we were still there, while mom was praying the Rosary in the back seat. It worked. We got there! I felt like kissing the cabbie! He knew the way, I didn't. I had to trust him.

If we want to get to heaven, if we want to live life to the full (*I came that you may have life and have it in abundance.*), if we want to be happy as human beings (*I want my joy to be yours so your joy may be complete.*), then we have to follow the way that Jesus gives us. He knows the way and it's He, Himself. Interestingly, before the word "Christianity" was used to identify Jesus' followers, they were called followers of "The Way." Yet, in our blindness, our readiness to buy into the heresy of individualism, we've come up with the silly notion that we can find our own way to God and fulfillment as human beings any way we want. It doesn't matter, one way is as good as any other. Create your own morality, it doesn't matter. Your own life style, it doesn't matter; your own attitudes about life and death, it doesn't matter. I'm not saying others can't find God, but it would have taken me hours to find the Champs-Elysees and AVIS rent-a-car by myself. If at my funeral someone sings Frank Sinatra's song, **I Did I My Way**, thinking it expressed who I was, I would be in deep trouble. Don't let anyone sing it!

Now, this is the amazing part. Jesus wants to bring us to the Father. While many of us just want rules to follow, regulations to tell us what to do, Jesus has a better idea. He wants to go with us! He invites us to live in

union with him, united to one another in his risen Spirit. Sharing in his life is what will get us there. While doing what we are told is how we all begin as children, and rightly so, there comes a time when we must take responsibility for our Christian identity as followers of Jesus. That is what our young people are doing who are being confirmed next Sunday. Look at it this way. As Jesus did everything in union with the Father, he is asking us to do everything in union with him. The authority with which we will act as followers of Jesus will come from the Spirit of Jesus in our hearts. Today Jesus says the he is in the Father and the Father is in him. A bit later in John's gospel, Jesus will pray, "*May they be one Father, as you are in me and I am in you, may they be one in us.*"

On Easter Sunday we proclaimed that Jesus lives. Where? In us, and in all other true believers, through his Spirit. And living in that Spirit is what will give us life and give it in abundance; and that is what will give us a joy that no one can take from us.

It all sounds pretty risky. How do we know we are living in the Spirit of Jesus and not just going through the motions? Is it the time we spend in prayer each day, or before the Blessed Sacrament, or doing good things for others, or going on mission treks? I think the best test is the one that Jesus gave us to measure our lives by. "*By this will all know that you are my disciples, your love for one another.*" (John 13:35) If all the religious things we do do not make us more loving, what's the point? Jesus invites us into his very life. We called it in the old days, Sanctifying Grace. But no matter what you call it, it has to be the way of love, the truth that comes from love and a life that is lived in love, for Jesus is God and God is love.

If we are not here to grow in love, what's the point? A few years ago I called a guy to see how his sick wife was doing. His hearing was worse

than mine. When I said, “*This is Father Tom.*” He said, “*What?*” So I said again, “*This is Father Tom.*” He said, a bit irritatedly, “*Who?*” So I said “*Father Tom from St. Vincents.*” “*Go to hell!*” he said and slammed the phone in my ear. He goes to Mass regularly. What’s the point? May the Eucharist we now celebrate continue the transformation of our hearts.