

The Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 14, 2017

Our Gospel reading today finds the disciples in a state of sadness and confusion. Jesus has just told them that one of them was going to betray Him and that their leader — Simon Peter — was going to deny that he even knew Jesus.

The apostles were surrounded by a hostile Jewish leadership. They're certainly not on good terms with the local Roman occupying forces either. They've hooked up with a man who is turning out not to be the messiah, at least in the way they understand that term. They felt completely unprepared for whatever he intended for them to do.

But the truth is that Jesus told them this devastating news because He knew that later they *would* eventually come to understand the fullness of life He was to bring to the world and the absolute necessity of the cross that He, and eventually every one of them, would have to embrace.

But in spite of the fact that things were looking about as bad as they could get, Jesus wanted to assure them that He's going to prepare a place where they would one day join Him. He encouraged them by telling them that they already know the way to the place He was going. Thomas, of course, had doubts that he knew the way. So Jesus responded by telling them that He himself was the way, the truth and the life.

This was the very best way he could reassure his disciples (and us) that they could know and experience God the Father because Jesus is one with the Father. If they knew Jesus, they knew the Father.

Now, all of this wouldn't sink in to the disciple's heads until after Jesus' resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. But we have the benefit of two thousand years of reflection and countless examples from the lives of the saints who have demonstrated this most important revelation that Jesus is in fact the Way, the Truth and the Life.

And like the disciples, we too live in troubled and dangerous times. But we don't have to be afraid or unduly distressed about the state of the world. Nor do we have to be bound up in constant anxiety over every aspect of our lives.

Jesus was trying to assure his friends and all of us that the joy, peace, and love we long for really can be found in Jesus. The way to heaven is not a complex method or procedure that we have to comprehend and flawlessly complete. The way is Jesus Himself, who will help us with every step we take in faith. Thomas a Kempis wrote in the 15th century, "Without the Way, there is no going. Without the Truth, there is no knowing. Without the Life, there is no living."

This is the Good News. We must never lose heart even when life seems insufferably difficult. Our faith tells us that all of the suffering in this life, as real as it is, is only temporary. But we also don't want to fall into the mistake of thinking that we can't be happy until we get to heaven.

We need to know that following Jesus means that even in the middle of suffering and difficulties that God is totally committed to us. If we surrender to God with love, we shall see Him bring good out of even unbearable situations. All we have to do is let His Spirit form us more completely into the image of Jesus, who after all is the fullness of life. It worked for the apostles and the saints. And it will work for us too.