

5th Sunday of Easter (May 13-14, 2017)

- There are many lines from the scriptures that stick in our heads. Today's readings contain three that are familiar to most of us:
 - "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner [cornerstone]"
 - "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places [rooms]"
 - "I am the way, and the truth and the life"
- While these lines originate in Scripture, they also have a life of their own.
 - The line about the rejected stone reminds us that things we sometimes consider worthless can in fact be the most precious of all.
 - The rooms in "my Father's house" comfort us at funerals.
 - The "way, the truth and the life" encapsulate what Jesus is for us.
- But hearing them again in the readings provides an opportunity to think about them as they would have been heard when they were first spoken.
- This context is one we have been hearing about in the readings since Easter: the early days of the Christian community following Jesus's death and resurrection. The readings speak to us about how that community was established, including the challenge of understanding that Jesus was risen from the dead and the difficulty of bringing different people together into a single community.
- It's easy to think of our community – the Church – as something that has always existed. But it didn't; it had to be formed to accomplish the many things it does today.
- It most obviously brings people together to share their lives and support each other. But a broader function is to be the principal medium for Jesus's message, the Good News.
- So what does this context of the formation of our Christian community tell us about the three memorable lines I have noted and what we can make of them?

- The first line is about stones. The connection between people and stones is not obvious. In fact, it is hard to think of two things that are more different. People are living beings that move and change. Stones are inert objects that stay the same.
- But stones are a fundamental building material, a found material that is part of the natural world, and a very durable material that provides one of the most robust forms of shelter or protection.
- You can think of a physical structure as an image of a human one, a community of believers that nourishes them and protects them from threats in the world around them.
- We are accustomed to calling the building we are in right now a “church”. We also call our community of believers a church. They complement each other and demonstrate that the pursuit of spiritual things requires temporal support.
- So, perhaps the divide between stones and people is not as great as we think. After all, Jesus said to Peter, “on this rock I will build my church”. So if Peter the rock can be the foundation, it is not difficult to imagine members of the Christian community as the stones from which it is built, and Jesus as the cornerstone that orients the others and ties them together in a solid structure.
- And if we have a building, there must be rooms, which is the word used in many versions of John’s Gospel. The passage we have just heard speaks of “dwelling places”. And some versions speak of “mansions”.
- A room or dwelling place is where you go to for shelter, for rest and communion with your family. It is home, the place you come back to at the end of the day.
- The notion of Jesus preparing a home comforts us in times of trouble with the belief that there is a place to go to escape the travails of life.
- But can we get there? This is Thomas’s worry in today’s Gospel when he asks Jesus, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”. Thomas, who wants to see things with his own eyes, not surprisingly also wants a clear roadmap to take him to the rooms Jesus is preparing.

- And so we come to Jesus as “the way, and the truth and the life”, three concepts that also take us back to a community focused on Jesus.
- This is an iconic phrase, but also one we have to be careful of when trying to understand what it means. It has been used to suggest that only Catholics will get to heaven and that non-Christians are following the wrong path.
- Last week’s Gospel about Jesus as the gate to the sheepfold has also been interpreted this way.
- I struggle with this, not the least because some of the people who are closest to me, my family members, are no longer practising Catholics, and do not consider themselves Catholic. Am I supposed to believe I will never meet them in heaven?
- About 4 years ago, [Pope Francis](#) engaged in a discussion with Eugenio Scalfari, the atheist co-founder of an Italian newspaper called Le Repubblica. Mr. Scalfari posed a series of questions to Pope Francis. The first question was whether “the God of Christians forgives one who doesn’t believe and doesn’t seek the faith.” Pope Francis answered by saying “the mercy of God has no limits if one turns to him with a sincere and contrite heart; the question for one who doesn’t believe in God lies in obeying one’s conscience”.
- The second question is related to the one that I have just posed: whether it is sinful to think that there is no absolute truth, that there are only relative or subjective truths.
- Pope Francis’s answer provides me with a great deal of comfort. He said:

Now truth, according to the Christian faith, is the love of God for us in Jesus Christ. Therefore, truth is a relationship! So true is it, that each one of us also takes up the truth and expresses it from ourselves: from our history and culture, from the situation in which we live, etc.
- He went on to explain this notion of truth as a relationship formed within the surroundings we live in:

This doesn’t mean that truth is variable or subjective, quite the opposite. But it means that it is given to us always and only as a way and a life. Did not Jesus himself say: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”?

- And he concluded:

In other words, truth being altogether one with love, requires humility and openness to be sought, received and expressed.

- In the context of a Christian community I take this to mean that we are searching for something together, we are following a common path to discover the truth. Exactly what the truth is may not always be clear. The search for truth can be both unifying and divisive as different individuals or groups come to different conclusions about what it is.
- But, as Pope Francis suggests, truth is inextricably linked to the way and the life. “The way, and the truth and the life” is not a set of rules. It is Jesus as God and a person, it is who he was and what he did and said. Jesus is the incarnation of the basis for our Christian community and the cornerstone to which we must constantly return. But who is to say this basis cannot be discovered and lived by those who have never heard of Jesus.

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