
WORD MADE FLESH

Fifth Sunday of Easter*

Acts 6:1-7, Psalm 33, 1Peter 2:4-9, John 14:1-12

We have entered that time of the liturgical year when the scripture reflects on the Church and the disciplines that build "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." Today's texts point the way to our becoming people of God.

The reading from Acts, recalling the church's service to the poor within her midst and the calling forth of the first diaconal ministers, concludes with the curious line that the "disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith." Of what is such obedience and how is it that "many priests became obedient to the faith"? The entrance of grace into the lives of human beings is intended to grow so that the faithful become the living presence of the kingdom of God.

1 Peter says that we are born into the "royal priesthood" by the "mighty acts of Him who called [us] out of darkness into His marvellous light." The grace which leads us through "the death of the old self" comes to full fruit in the resurrected life. Being called from the death of estrangement into the "marvellous light" of God's life is the beginning of the spiritual journey.

In today's Gospel the full impact of living the sanctified life presents itself to us. It is commonly called Jesus' farewell discourse for it was given at table with his disciples, at the last supper, just after Judas had declared himself, removed himself from the table and fled out into the night. We often forget that Judas was a disciple and, for a time, was on the journey toward the kingdom. His discourse speaks to all who struggle to be faithful.

This is surely one of the most abused Gospel texts, used over and over again to justify the brutality of militant "Christians" in their attack on those of other faiths or of no faith at all. Here Jesus says to his disciples, "you know the way," the way into the presence of the kingdom of God. Thomas frankly responds that he does not understand the impending journey, its destination, and "how can we know the way?" Jesus then says to them all -- remember, this is the vigil of the crucifixion -- "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also."

Thomas' question is a common one for the faithful. The early church fathers and mothers were asked this question often. It is the question of the vigil night in life's journey, and they respond by saying that "you may be the only Christ the stranger ever meets." They said it in response to all who struggle for the presence of life and are filled with uneasiness at the terrors of history. They said it because they understood clearly that Jesus' Gospel was that God loves the creation and calls it from estrangement and darkness to the fullness in which it was made. They said it because they knew that we have been called by the presence of God into the fullness of our created being, the fullness of life.

The disciplines of the Church are in service to our dwelling in the presence of the kingdom, our living the light of our created being.

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*Originally published in The Western Catholic Reporter, May 9, 1993