

Homily – Fifth Sunday of Easter – 10 May 2020

“There are many rooms in my Father’s house.” In today’s Gospel passage, Jesus is offering reassurance – and a promise – to his beleaguered disciples. He has just washed their feet, in a dramatic gesture of service and self-giving love; Judas Iscariot – the one who will betray him – has left the building, as it were. He has sneaked out to make arrangements for Jesus’ arrest with the Jewish authorities. Night has fallen indeed. The hour of darkness has arrived. Now, then, Jesus begins his last, long, heart-to-heart discussion with the remaining disciples. It is the so-called farewell discourse, in which he states that he will not be with them much longer. When Peter protests, and declares that he will lay down his life for him, Jesus responds with the painful words: “before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times.” In order to offer his confused and hurting disciples some comfort in the days and weeks ahead, he speaks to them about his relationship with God the Father (“I am in the Father, and the Father is in me”), and he assures his followers that they will join him in his Father’s house.

In fact, this is such a beautiful passage, full of hope for the future, that it is often a popular choice of Gospel at funeral Masses. “Trust in God still, and trust in me.” The words are so appropriate, so welcome for those who grieve. And they are so welcome for each one of us at this particular moment in time, huddled together in our own homes – frustrated, anxious, perhaps fearful. Jesus’ earthly body is no longer with us here, as it was in that upper room with the disciples, just before his arrest and trial. What should we do? What direction should we follow, as modern-day disciples? So many different paths lie before us in our lives: some lead us along the right way, others take us to dead ends. The words of the disciple Thomas – who represents the realist, the sceptic – these words could have been uttered by any one of us here: “Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” The one direction that we should follow is the direction left to us by Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life. Following him means accepting the challenge and carrying on his work.

In our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we see the steady growth of the very early gathering of followers – the infant Church. It's clear that helpers are needed. The Apostles can't do it all on their own. Similarly, the task in building up the contemporary Church cannot be left to the clergy – everyone is called to help, from the youngest to the oldest, according to their abilities and their state of life. Each of us has a role to play in constructing the kingdom here on earth, and we can achieve this most effectively if the foundations are strong.

For this, we need to be living stones, to quote Peter (*Petrus*, the rock) in our Second Reading – in other words, we have to be rock-hard in our faith, solid in our commitment, and durable and reliable in our parish. Peter knew only too well what he was talking about. Writing many years after his fearful rejection of Jesus in the courtyard of the palace of the High Priest Caiaphas, and then following on from the beautiful scene of reconciliation at the Sea of Galilee, where it all started, Peter has accepted his responsibility as a mature follower of the Way – as a Christian – and has dedicated himself to building the Church. That Church will only stand strong on living, dynamic stones. Jesus is the corner stone, rejected by builders, the Apostles form the foundations, and we constitute the bricks and mortar. The Church has been built, generation after generation, on the believers who have come before us, and have gone on to occupy their rooms in the heavenly home.

Let's make sure that we always strive to be stones that last for all time, that never crumble, and through our faith, through our works of charity and mercy, through our love for and involvement in our parish, we will help to build this spiritual house here on earth higher and higher. "I tell you most solemnly, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, he will perform even greater works, because I am going to the Father."