



Fifth Sunday of Easter (Year A)

Homily

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**Sunday 10 May 2020
Cathedral Parish House, Perth**

Some years ago, I had a very interesting conversation with the leader of one of the religious orders here in Australia. He was speaking of the challenges being faced by religious congregations at this time in the history of the Church. Numbers were falling as members grew older and new vocations were few and far between. At the same time, the ministries in which the religious congregations were involved, especially in education and in healthcare, were becoming more and more complex and challenging. In the face of all this, this particular Religious Leader had come to the conclusion that he needed to stop constantly reminding the members of his Congregation of the high ideals to which they were being called, because he believed that to do so was only increasing their sense of discouragement as they realised how inadequate so many of them were to fulfil the tasks which the Church and society was asking of them.

At one level, this advice seemed practical. Certainly a sense of inadequacy and discouragement was not uncommon among members of religious orders. At the same time, as I reflected on this discussion, I came to the conclusion that I could not agree with this particular Religious Leader. There is no doubt that the ideals to which members of religious orders are called are very high. The same, of course, is absolutely true of every Christian, of every disciple of Jesus. After all, it was Jesus himself who, after a long series of parables and instructions to his disciples, summed it all up by saying quite simply, *“You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”*. There could hardly be a higher ideal than this.

None of us is perfect, and none of us ever will be as we continue along the journey of our lives. The point is, of course, that we **are** on a journey. Where we find ourselves today is different from where we found ourselves yesterday and where we will find ourselves tomorrow. But to be on a journey means that we are going somewhere - that we have a destination to which we are heading. If we lose sight of the destination, then there is a real chance that we will end up simply going round and round in circles and never actually moving forward. The ideals of the Christian life, all summed up as I say in Jesus' call to us to be perfect, represent the destination of our lives to which we are heading. If we take our eyes off the ideal, or if we decide that the journey is just too difficult or the ideals just too demanding, and decide to substitute the destination for a less onerous one, we will certainly never arrive at the place to which God is inviting us.



In calling us to perfection, Jesus reminds us in this morning's gospel that he is the Way and the Truth and the Life.

Jesus spoke these words during the Last Supper to one of his disciples, Thomas, who was distressed because Jesus was speaking of leaving his disciples in order to return to his Father. Thomas did not want to lose Jesus and so, when Jesus tried to reassure him that he had no intention of abandoning his disciples, Thomas cried out, almost in desperation, *"Lord, we do not know where you are going so how can we know the way?"* And it is then that Jesus gives Thomas and the other disciples, and indeed all his disciples including us, the fundamental roadmap we must follow if we wish to find our way to Jesus and to experience the fullness of life with him. *"I am the Way,"* he says, *"follow me and let me be your only guide. I am the Truth, believe in me, entrust yourself to me, and let my words and my example be the light which shines on every decision you make. I am the Life, live in me and with me, let me live in you and with you, so that the richness of my life might heal and strengthen you in the living of your life."*

As we look back over the last few months, and as we reflect on the decisions we have made and the way we have managed the many challenges of the Covid-19 crisis through which we have all been living, we will, I believe, be able to evaluate just how faithful we are being to the Lord whose way we are called to follow, whose truth we are called to entrust ourselves to, and whose life we are invited to allow to shine in our own lives. We will all be able to see in ourselves, and in those around us, the signs of the living spring of life which comes from our commitment to the Lord Jesus. At the same time, we will inevitably recognise those moments when it has not been the Lord's way we have followed, it has not been the Lord's truth which has guided our decisions, and it has not been the Lord's life which has animated us. Fortunately, as the whole gospel tradition makes so clear, the Lord's way is the way of forgiveness and compassion, the Lord's truth is the truth of God's unfailing mercy, and the Lord's life is that gift of renewal and rebirth which is the fruit of his resurrection from the dead.

I hope that today the words of Jesus might find a place in our minds and in our hearts. He is our way and our truth and our life. We can afford to take him at his word. We can afford to entrust ourselves to him. He does hold out before us a high ideal but he does not leave us alone to try and reach this ideal by ourselves. He gives us the gift of each other within the community of the Church and he promises to be with us whenever, and however, we gather in his name even to the end of time. We do not need to be afraid and we do not need to be discouraged or despairing. He is with us, he loves and understands us, and he never stops offering us his compassion, his mercy and his healing and strengthening grace.