

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, May 16th 2014

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” It is an audacious claim but, perhaps, no more so than what we celebrate in the Fourth Week of Easter, namely, that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

Christians need to be careful that we do not make Christianity about something other than Jesus. It is not a philosophy per se, although many philosophers have faith in Jesus. It is not about doing theology, although theologians might themselves be great believers. A fellow student in graduate school mentioned that he thought a certain theologian’s writing was profound. The professor told the student that the man had written some good words but that those words did not come from a life of faith: the man was an atheist. The message was clear: do not aspire to be anything in life that does not have Jesus in the center. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

This is the heart of the Apostle Paul’s homily in the synagogue. Those who condemned Jesus fulfilled the oracles of the prophets. Jesus fulfills the ancient prophecies, God’s promises to his children. Paul only has one homily; he just starts that homily at different places and gets to his point traveling different routes. But his homily is always about Jesus, the Son of God, the one begotten from the Father. The Father raised Jesus from the dead. God has placed his stamp on Jesus; he affirms that Jesus is indeed the way, the truth, and the life. This is Paul’s “word of salvation.”

Most people that we meet, whether they are disciples like the Apostle Thomas or people who have never believed in Jesus, do not know the way. The Way – this was the term used for the church as recorded in those first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. Their message to the world: we know the way. Do you want to know the way to happiness and joy – the way to eternal life – the way to peace in the midst of suffering – the way to triumph over sin and death – the way that will save you from misery, boredom, the empty way of life passed on to us from our ancestors? The way is Jesus. To be on the Way is to trust in Jesus. In one of his earliest homilies, the Apostle Peter said, “There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.” There is no other way.

Ahh, but here is the beauty of it: there is a way. I know so many young people who live lives of despair. They are anxious, bored, frustrated, and have no sense of meaning beyond the shallow relationships that only eventually lead to even greater despair. They remind me of mice in a maze with no way of escape. They do not believe that there is a way so they fill up their time with activity after activity designed to help them forget. Just get me through the night; I will deal the best I can with this crummy world, if the morning comes. How do we tell our beautiful friends, and show them, that Jesus is the way, the only way, to what they seek?

I certainly do not have a lot of answers but it seems to me that the place to begin is to not clutter things up with anything but Jesus.

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