

Today's Gospel continues our Easter Season journey through passages in the Gospel of John. Jesus at the Last Supper is looking past his passion and death to the life of the early Church, to the giving of the Spirit, and to the ministry that the apostles are going to carry out after his death.

Jesus' friends are worried about what they'll do when Jesus is gone. So he's describing what their lives will be like and what they will be doing after he's died, risen and ascended into heaven. He's leaving, but he is going to return and bring *them* - his new Church - to be with him in a heavenly home with his Father - to share the life of the Trinity in heaven. It's a comforting and reassuring message - that's why it's frequently used at funerals.

The first thing that jumps out at me is one of his most famous statements: "I am the way, and the truth, and life." Most of us understand his basic meaning. Jesus is the only path to salvation, he is the only savior of the world, and he is the only one who can give eternal life.

But there is a little more to it. When Jesus says: "I am the way," the word he uses literally means a path or road - a road that leads you to heaven. And Jesus' picture of heaven is not just a kind of invisible Disneyland in the sky - a perfect place with lots of puffy clouds - or maybe a Hollywood version of heaven. Jesus' vision of heaven is the life of the Trinity - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He knows this because he has been with the Father from the beginning - before time and creation ever existed.

And when Jesus says "I am the truth," he is telling us that he has the fullness of the truth, not just a little part of the truth. There is a lot of truth and goodness and beauty in the various major religions of the world. But Jesus isn't just a piece of the truth, he doesn't just have some of the truth. And it's not just *his* version of the truth. He has all of the truth, because he *is* the truth. He is the truth come in person.

And then he says "I am the life." Well, the life he is talking about is not just natural life. It is not just biological life. It is supernatural life - life even beyond what we can see every day. It is eternal life, the life of the Trinity, the life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If you want to have the best natural life there are all kinds of things you can do. You can eat good food, you can stay healthy and exercise and keep yourself in shape. But if you want the life of the world to come - the life of the Trinity, there is only one way to get there, and that is with Jesus of Nazareth. You have to become his disciple.

Jesus shows us the way. Jesus teaches us the truth. And Jesus offers us the life that leads us back to God. To be his disciple, you have to walk on the path with him, learn the fullness of truth from him and pattern your life on the life that he lived in order to enter into the eternal life of the Trinity.

Another line that jumps out at me is about these "greater works" the apostles will perform. So what are these greater works? Well I think that the best example of a miracle that Jesus did not perform during his time on earth was the ordination of the seven deacons that we heard in the first reading. It's truly a miracle that a successor of Peter in our lifetime can confer the Sacrament of Holy Orders and can make a deacon out of a grumpy, sinful man. That's a miracle. And maybe that's just my perspective, but for most of us, we are more amazed by the visible, material miracles that Jesus performed in his lifetime than by anything that has happened since Jesus.

I think that Jesus is saying that the sacraments are actually these greater miracles. Because what Jesus does during his public ministry, through his visible miracles, points forward to what he will do through the apostles and their successors - as the Catholic Church - through the Holy Spirit, invisibly, in the mysteries of the Sacraments.

Look at it this way: If a priest hears the confession of a person who is in mortal sin and that person is forgiven, that one sacramental act is a greater work than the creation of the whole universe. Because the universe - as huge as it is - is going to pass away. But the eternal life given back to that person - that lasts forever, that's eternal.

So Baptism, the Eucharist, Confession and the other sacraments that give Jesus' disciples the gift of eternal life - I think these are some of the greater miracles than Jesus is describing to his Apostles. And on most days, I think that it takes more effort and more discipline to avoid the way of following Jesus, and to ignore the truth of his Church, and to keep the promise of eternal life out of our minds and hearts.

So in our lives, I hope that when we hear Jesus describe himself as the way, and the truth, and life, we take it to heart, knowing that he is the path to salvation, he is the truth and he is the only one who can give eternal life.

I also hope that we remain close to the sacraments that Jesus gave us, especially the Eucharist we celebrate today. Not just because this gathering brings together heaven and earth. Not just because worshipping God as he showed us makes the world a better place. But because these and the other sacraments provide the ways that we can follow him on the path to eternal life with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen?

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- Deacon Jack Schaefer