

## Year A – 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Despite the weather the past week or so, it is not the beginning of spring. We are actually a couple of weeks from the start of summer. Summer is the time when people start thinking about what they will be doing for a vacation this year, if they have not already decided. For families with children, the children are out from school and looking for ways to spend their summertime. Everyone, not just children, need time for rest, relaxation and rejuvenation. Even priests and religious are required to take time to go on retreat and re-center themselves with time in prayer.

Vacations can be relaxing when you understand that serious planning goes into making the basic decisions: where are we to go, for how long, and how to get there. The question of where to go will cause you to think about where you have already been. If you have children, will everyone find something of interest? You will also have to decide whether you want a place that is warm and sunny, or cool and quiet. You might choose a place to visit that is near relatives, and that might determine how long you might stay. That's not to say you don't get along with your relatives.

The answer to the question of how you will get to the chosen vacation spot has many parts. How far away do you have to go? Will the distance you need to travel require a car, an airplane, a train, a ship, or some combination of them? If you go by airplane, train or ship you need to be concerned about make reservations, not to mention how much it will cost.

Yes, vacations are a time for getting away, enjoying yourselves and relaxing.

Jesus tells his disciples that he is going away, but not for a vacation. This occurs on the night that he will be betrayed and the day before his crucifixion. He says that he is going to prepare a place for his disciples and will return to them. He tells them they know the way to get to where he is going. Our friendly disciple, Thomas, questions Jesus about knowing the way, since they do not know where he is going. Even though the disciples have remained with Jesus throughout his ministry they still do not fully understand who Jesus is really. They have come to recognize him as a great teacher and have seen him perform marvelous signs, but they have an incomplete faith and understanding of him. Recall that it is Thomas who refused, at first, to believe that Jesus had actually risen and appeared to the disciples.

You have to cut Thomas, and the other disciples, a small amount of slack. You must remember that the Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus, would not be sent until he had returned to his Father. Jesus' resurrection and ascension was still a couple of days away. Thomas' questioning goes to what type of messiah the disciples thought Jesus was, namely a kingly messiah like King David who would return glory to Israel. For Jesus messiah-ship meant doing the will of God, the Father, and entering into his glory of the cross. It would not be until the disciples received the Holy Spirit that they would come to understand what being messiah really meant for Jesus.

The disciples might not have fully understood Jesus before his death and resurrection, but afterwards they did. They knew that Jesus was the truth that led to eternal life with God, the Father.

At this time of the year we have a wonderful occurrence. Some of the younger members of our community will be coming forward to receive First Eucharist. Just as vacations need planning so

too does reception of First Eucharist. When our children were Baptized they received the gift of God's life within them, which is the gift of grace. Their parents then began to form their children in the faith of the Church. They helped them learn the basic prayers of the community: the Hail Mary, the Our Father. They were patient with them when they were restless in church, because they did not yet understand what was happening, partially because they could not see over the pew. As the children grew older their parents brought them to be catechized and gain a beginners understanding of what the Eucharist means and how it bring us into contact with Jesus in a special way.

First Eucharist is a step for the children on their journey to eternal life. Throughout their lives they will come upon other steps that help them to have a fuller and deeper understanding of what that journey is about, and how much Jesus wants to accompany them on that journey. Through a love of receiving Jesus in the Eucharist they will be sustained on their way.

Those of us who have received Eucharist more times then we could remember have to be hearten by the joy of the young children approaching Eucharist for the first time. They have anticipation in their eyes and a smile on their lips.

Lest we forget, we are all on the same journey to life with Jesus and God, his Father. We have an advantage over Thomas, since we have the gospels, we know where Jesus has gone and we know the way to get to him. We have to make the decision each day to follow Jesus as the way to eternal life.