

Death DOES NOT Have Dominion

Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Acts 7:55-60;

Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

1 Peter 2:2-10;

John 14:1-14;

POP III, Great Thanksgiving Prayer A

Generous God, whose life is freely given in Jesus Christ our Lord: as you have opened for us your house of many rooms, so may we make a place for the rejected and unloved, and share in the work of peace; through Jesus Christ the cornerstone. AMEN.

We know that Christ is raised and dies no more. Embraced by death, he broke its fearful hold, and our despair he turned to blazing joy. Alleluia!

(Cantus Mundi: Hymn)

“Lord, we do not know where you are going.

“How can we know the way?”

{Pause} Please be seated {Pause}

////////////////////////////////////

My dearest friends in Christ Jesus,

Let me take just one second to orient us, to what is happening
(AND to where we are),

So, we might be able to know where we are going.

On this Fifth Sunday of Easter,

We find ourselves Four Weeks, and Three Days Back ...

Oh, and about Two Millenia too, (just for good measure).

At least that is where we find ourselves in the Gospel narrative. //

AND, just to keep my ‘Five, four, three, two, one’ narrative in play,

... If we orient ourselves to our First Reading,

A reading from the Book of Acts,

We are probably advancing by about a year,

Ahead of Gospel Narrative for this Sunday,

(Though by church tradition, the Feast of Saint Stephen,

(Is commonly celebrated on the 26th of December,

(Followed by the Feast of S. John & Holy Innocents).



So, if you are a little disoriented this morning,

Perhaps you can understand the words of my favorite disciple,
(That is Thomas—commonly called ‘the Doubter.’)

As Jesus begins what has long been called

The Johannine Final Discourse Message. /////

“Yo, Jesus, How can we know the way?

“We don’t know where you are going.”

And I guess to place it in my own words:

‘I am so confused as to time and place,

‘That if my daughter Megan, did a cognitive assessment,

‘I am pretty sure I would receive a score of zero!’ ///

/// So, let’s review so we all can be as confused as Thomas is!

If we go back four weeks, three days, and two millennia,

(And perhaps an extra week),

We might remember my personal favorite disciple saying:

“Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

This is, of course Thomas’ response,

To Jesus’ ludicrous decision, to head back toward

Jerusalem, to raise Lazarus from the dead! /////



By this point, the disciples are pretty sure that Jesus is Messiah,

But Jesus is constantly talking about weird stuff,

Like being handed over to death on a tree,

And other really bizarre things,

That simply don't fit with their vision

Of what a Messiah is supposed to look like.



To put it quite bluntly, the disciples

Are perhaps expecting King David, (You know...)

The one who slaughtered many of Israel's enemies.

But here they are (and we were just one week ago) looking,

At some crazy shepherd who does not fit the mold,

And is quite likely to get himself (and the disciples) killed,

If he keeps coming to a life and death battle,

Between the Sadducees, the Pharisees,

And the Roman Authorities,

With his hands 'wide open'

Offering himself as a sacrifice.



Hey, we came looking for a king but all we are getting

Is a weird shepherd who came to the battlefield,

To fight a giant, with a bag of rocks, and a pair of sandals!

‘Yo, Jesus get with the program here...

‘We’ve seen lots of really cool stuff lately,

‘Like raising Lazarus from the dead,

And like verbal fist-i-cuffs with hated Sadducees and Pharisees

But you are failing miserably at forming yourself

Into our image and your speech is sounding like

You will no longer be with us,

And we are scared, and really confused.

////////////////////////////////////

Christ’s response to our fear is of course a passage,

That we have heard many times at the graveside

Of our loved ones. These are the words,

Which the disciples heard for the first time,

From the very one

Who had very recently raised Lazarus

From the very graveside

They see Jesus approaching:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.

“Believe in God, believe also in me.

“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.

“If it were not so, would I have told you

“That I go to prepare a place for you?”

“And if I go and prepare a place for you,

“I will come again and will take you to myself,

“So that where I am, there you may be also.

“And you know the way to the place

“Where I am going.”



Even though Thomas says,

“We do not know where you are going,

“How can we know the way?”



Thomas knows where Jesus is going,

He simply does not understand how a shepherd David,

Stripped even of his bag of rocks, and of his sandals,

Could ever fight the real giant that lies ahead,

The Giant who separates us from God, in death.

It is not that Thomas misunderstands where Jesus is going,

It is that Thomas (*and we often*), fail to understand,

How the big giant death can ever be defeated.

While Thomas, likely comprehends the words stated yesterday,

In the celebration of a man and a women in the solemn

Liturgy of Holy Matrimony—“Till Death Do Us Part.”

The problem for Thomas, is how we can love

And be loved by God, even after

“Death Does Do Us Part.”

////////////////////////////////////

Death from an earthly perspective seems the final answer,

Death seems to have final dominion,

But, if God is Life, how can death reign,

If death truly has the final answer than death is God,

BUT: God is God, and God is Life, and God is Eternal,

And death is temporary, death is a created thing,

And it will one day be placed under the feet

Of the one true shepherd—the Messiah Christ Jesus,

And as Paul had said it so eloquently,

Barely two decades later:

If there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:

And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and
Your faith is also vain.

Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God;

Because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ:
Whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.

For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:

And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain;
Ye are yet in your sins.

Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.

AND if in this life only we have hope in Christ,
We are of all men most miserable.

But now is Christ risen from the dead,

And become the firstfruits of them that slept.

For since by man came death,

By man came also the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits;

Afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

Then cometh the end,

When he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God,
Even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule
And all authority and power.

For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

For he hath put all things under his feet.

But when he saith all things are put under him,

It is manifest that he is excepted,

Which did put all things under him.

And when all things shall be subdued unto him,

Then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that

Put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

... ..

For Behold, I shew you a mystery;

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,

At the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and

The dead shall be raised incorruptible,

And we shall be changed.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and

This mortal must put on immortality.

So, when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption,

And this mortal shall have put on immortality,

Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written,

Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is thy sting?

O grave, where is thy victory?

The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory

Through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable,

Always abounding in the work of the Lord,

Forasmuch as ye know that your labour

Is not in vain in the Lord.

////////////////////////////////////

OK, I'll never be able to beat the exact words of scripture.

Perhaps that is why it was written for our comfort,

And for our challenge. //////////////////////////////////

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the HS.