Easter 5A 2020 As Jesus returns to His Father He promises us a place there,

prayers answered and much work to do.

John 14: 1 - 14

[Jesus said: ] Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way to where I am going.” 5 Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” 6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

8 Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” 9 Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

12 “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. 13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

Why are your hearts sad? Our answer may be obvious in the middle of a pandemic. There is great sadness in burying the dead however it happens. Our sadness is multiplied by the images of dead bodies in empty Italian churches, filled refrigerator trucks in New York being employed as temporary morgues and long lines of urns in Wuhan. Our hearts are sad from isolation and missing the embraces of family and perhaps from our mothers on this Mother’s Day.

The disciples were sad after their Lord said He was leaving them. Jesus told the anxious disciples that where He was going they could not follow. He was going to his death on the cross. He had to face it alone in order to save all.

But that did not soothe the disciples. They were sad that He would leave them. They were his travelling companions for three years and had hoped for a bright future with Him. They could only think of their lives here and now and how empty it would be without Jesus. Their eyes could only see what was in front of them. Their hearts were heavy without Jesus.

We can relate to them in our present suffering of the covid 19 pandemic and the self-isolation. It has also brought about a loss of community. The virtual gatherings on computers and video phones are better than nothing but virtual hugs and embraces are not the same. There is a coldness there that technology cannot overcome.

We also miss our gatherings as God’s people. Have you ever gone without Holy Communion for this long? Do you miss singing together and praying together? This sad loss of community among Christians is aggravated by the added insult that church is regarded by the world as a non-essential service. We are allowed to shop at garden centers but not allowed to meet as church.

Thanks be to God that none of this can undo the Lord’s Resurrection. The weight of the stone rolled in front of His tomb was no problem. The Roman guards posted could not stop Him. Jesus had to rise from the dead because He is Life. He is **The Life** and Resurrection. When He wanted to take up His life again what or who could stand in His way?

After His resurrection, the disciples were filled with joy and fear but Jesus would leave them again after 40 days, when Jesus ascended to the Father. The disciples would no longer see Him or embrace Him. Mary Magdalene tried to hold on to the Risen Jesus but He could be held down.

The Ascension of Our Lord is coming up in 11 days. We are used to meeting together on that Thursday evening. We celebrated Holy Communion on that wonderful Feast Day. We sang the great Ascension Hymns. But not his year. This year our hearts are sad and lonely.

The Risen Lord speaks right into our sad hearts a glorious promise that shatters the gloom and breaks the loneliness. Jesus promises to prepare a place for us. He said that His father’s house is not only a house of prayer but is a house that has many rooms. One of those rooms is meant for you. The divine purpose of His ascension He makes clear by promising to prepare a place for us. Jesus will come again and take us to Himself, so that where He is we may be also.

This is exactly what we need to hear. What joy to know that He never breaks any of His promises! He promised to take us to be with Him. What comfort as we wither in isolation and what comfort as we face our mortal death! As Jesus promised the penitent thief He also says to his followers that we will join Him in paradise.

As Holy Scripture foretold His resurrection, Jesus now promised that He would return for us and usher us into His father’s house. What joy can compare to that? The assurance of it happening lies in Him and nowhere else. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him.

Jesus opened **The Way** to Father on His cross. His broken body is the way into the Father’s presence as the temple curtain in Jerusalem represents his body and was torn so that we have access to the Father through his innocent suffering and bloody death. When the temple veil was torn from top to bottom, Jesus had breathed his last and offered his sacred blood in the Father’s presence as the only way for us to go there.

It was done without any good intentions on our part. We have no merit or worthiness before God. It was done by His love for His father and us alone. This is **The Truth** that stands for all the ages. “For the law came through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:17)

By His grace, we are assured of a place to stay with the Father where true joys are found. This marks an end to our sadness. It also gives us assurance that our prayers in His name are heard. Not because of anything in us, but for His name’s sake. The Resurrection of our Lord and His glorious Ascension inspires us to be bold in prayer and confident that our prayers are heard.

Our work as Christians is to pray for the life of the world. We pray that the Lord would end this pandemic according to his will but we pray more certainly that God’s saving gospel come to all because that is His will.

So our work of prayer and witnessing to Jesus as the Way, the Truth and Life never ends. It is based on his resurrection. His ascension reminds us of where we are headed and what is most important in life and death. See how much work there is for us to do! Jesus promised that whatever we ask according to His will, He will do it. See what joy is ours and what awaits us!

Collect: O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.