

### **Acts 7.55-end**

But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

### **Psalm 31**

In you, O LORD, I seek refuge;  
do not let me ever be put to shame;  
in your righteousness deliver me.  
Incline your ear to me;  
rescue me speedily.  
Be a rock of refuge for me,  
a strong fortress to save me.  
You are indeed my rock and my fortress;  
for your name's sake lead me and guide me,  
take me out of the net that is hidden for me,  
for you are my refuge.  
Into your hand I commit my spirit;  
you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.

### **1 Peter 2.2-10**

For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

"He committed no sin,  
and no deceit was found in his mouth."  
When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten;

but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

### **John 14.1-14**

"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." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 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; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

John 14 is a classic example of a chapter in John's Gospel. The Jesus that emerges from John's Gospel stands in many ways in contrast to the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and Mark.

In the synoptic's Jesus moves quickly from pillar to post, offering a great one liner whenever he meets an interlocutor ready to engage him. He is rather passive in his ministry and ultimately cuts a rather mysterious figure. In John's Gospel, Jesus moves about freely, often taking the stage whenever it is provided and once he starts talking he doesn't seem to stop. He is capable of talking in great monologues all of which prove to be exquisite theology concerning himself in his relationship to the Father. It is that relationship that is central for Jesus not only in his teaching but for his identity. We must always remember that when Jesus is engaged in a dispute with the Pharisee's he is the very same Jesus in chapter one, only going under the name 'Word'. We have to constantly remind ourselves that the author of this Gospel always held them to be the same being.

The first block of text provides a wonderful reading that is often used in the context of funerals of which there have been many since the lockdown. It provides that biblical image of the Father's kingdom containing many rooms. This is an image that has sustained many Christians along life's way. It offers that reassuring view that the cosmic diversity of creation is invited to ultimately rest in the Father's house forevermore. It is as the Prodigal son notes, a home coming. The Father's house is now our home through adoption through Jesus Christ.

The beauty of the image is enhanced as Jesus himself is the one who promises to come back and take you to be with him. The Father's house is to be a communal experience with Jesus at the very centre amidst his people. This is the meaning of Jesus' reply to Thomas. He places himself

and the relationship he enjoys with the Father at the forefront of his offer that he makes to us. That relationship is now available to us.

This is the cause of the frustration for Jesus when Phillip asks him to show us the Father. On one level we can have sympathy with Phillip, Jesus is not God the Father, he is God the Son. Yet because intimacy and obedience of the relationship with his Father he is able to speak and act on the Father's behalf and in his authority.

It is perhaps comforting to know that even the close band of men and women that surrounded Jesus during the ministry were in some way unclear of how Jesus and the Father interacted. Many of us wish that we could jump in the time machine and go back and be a member of that rag tag bunch of fishermen and women. To see Jesus with our own eyes, to hear the authority with which he spoke.

It is clear from those that followed Jesus and from the historical impact he has made on the world that there was something deeply enigmatic about Jesus. What happened on that first Easter Sunday is the culmination of a life lived in the love of the Father. We do not have the ability to cultivate this relationship independently of Christ. It is the gift of Jesus who hears his words and sees his works. These are the works of the Father in the world that he created and has now through the son sought to redeem. Like a husband who has long been married to his wife, he can speak independently of the wife and relay her will accurately to the group. This is the intimacy of the Father to the Son, intimate that for all extents and purposes we can talk of a unity. The reading ends by saying that as the authority of the Father is administered with love by the Son it is to indwell within the hearts of all who hear and respond to this message. What hears and receives this word is the Holy Spirit herself and the initial dispensation is now consummated in the uniting of the Trinity in which we have been caught up in by grace.