

Sunday, May 10, 2020

Fifth Sunday of Easter and Mother's Day

From Pastor Stephen, Zion Lutheran Church

**Welcome:**

A warm welcome to all who worship this day, gathered together by God, even when we are apart. Our readings today speak of how our loving God cherishes us and leads us home, even in moments of fear and terror, giving us vision and hope for the future. Our journeys as Christians may be different but our destination is the same – home to our loving God.

We also joyfully thank God for the gift of our mothers, signs of God's gracious love in the world.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**Prayer of the Day:** Let us pray:

Gracious God, your beloved Son is the way, the truth and the life. Grant us visions and faith that inspire us to journey with you and lead us, even when the path looks difficult and we are fearful, home to your loving arms. **Amen.**

**First Reading:** A reading from Acts 7: 55-60

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen 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.

**Second Reading:** A reading from First Peter 2: 9 - 10

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

**Gospel:** John 14: 1 – 7 The holy gospel according to John:

Jesus said to the disciples:

“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.”

## **Homily:**

Have you ever had someone give you directions to a place and then end their instructions with, “Don’t worry, you can’t miss it?” I always feel like responding: “Well, you do not know me very well, do you.”

I once drove for two hours on the wrong highway going the wrong direction. Almost every route I take becomes the scenic route. So I feel great sympathy for Thomas in today’s Gospel when he asks Jesus how he can know the way. Jesus tells him, “Don’t worry, you can’t miss it. Do not worry because I will go before you and then come back and take you along on the journey home. “Try not to worry so much,” Jesus tells Thomas. “Do not be afraid, for I am with you.”

We live in very anxious times when we worry about almost everything. Psychologists call the time we are living in the age of anxiety. Anxiety defines our culture and for many of us it is a way of life.

Jesus comes to calm those fears. He shows us God’s loving face and tells us to rest in God’s mercy and grace...for when we see Jesus we see the Father as well...and in knowing Jesus we know the Father, who loves us with an everlasting love. Together, we will find our way home ...for where Jesus is, we shall also be, forever. He will not have it any other way.

Stephen, in our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, received a vision that directed him home to God. That vision allowed him to be fearless in the face of the world's hatred. God provided what he needed for his journey home, with a new and radiant vision of eternal life.

Stephen's vision revealed the destination of the very difficult journey he was on and it strengthened his faith and courage. St. John had a similar vision in Revelation, where he saw God leading us back to paradise, from death to the life God originally intended for us to live – free from suffering, grief and pain. These visions are shared with us in scripture so that they might guide us as well on the Path of Life, so that we too can see the destination of our journey with Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life. The older I get, the more I cherish these visions given to the faithful in our scripture who went before me with Christ on paths that were indeed very difficult. In these times, it is good to see that the journey we are on, trying as it may be, will end well and joyfully because Christ accompanies us and leads us and calms our fears and our troubled hearts.

God gives us what we need to be faithful and leads us on the Path of Life, even in the midst of the world's suffering, hostility, pain, and death. God leads us on a journey that will end well, even if some of the terrain is a little rocky, or has a few dead ends and one-way streets and rough roads. Do not be afraid. Journey with me, Jesus said, for I am the way, the truth and the life. You do not need a map or a compass, for Jesus will bring you home. Who could ask for a better travelling companion.

## **Prayers of the Faithful:**

Gracious God, your Son leads us on the Path of Life, for he is truly the way, the truth and the life, and in him we see your face and know your presence among us. Grants us vision and wisdom to follow where you lead, for where you lead we will go with confidence. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our world, troubled by illness, plagued with fear and despair. Grant wisdom and skill to all who work on vaccinations and treatments, and watch over those who are ill and those who care for the sick. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our loved ones who we cannot be with us this Easter season. We pray for all in our parish who are mourning and all who are ill, or troubled in body, mind, or spirit. Grant them healing and peace. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all our mothers on this special day. We are thankful for all the gifts they bring into our lives, true signs of your grace and enduring love in our world. We pray also for those who are no longer with us, that we might see them again in our Heavenly Father's home, in the company of all your beloved saints. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things, and whatever else you see that we need, grant us, gracious God. Gathering all our prayers into one, we pray the prayer that you have taught us:

Our Father, who art in Heaven...

**Blessing:** May Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us always in the Risen Life of Christ our Lord. **Amen.**