

Fifth Sunday of Easter – A

[Acts 6:1-7; Psalm 33; 1Peter 2:4-9; John 14:1-12]

Over the last week or so provinces have announced strategies to re-launch their economies in stages. The transition from one level of freedom to the next will depend upon what is seen. Only the sight of positive trends in the data will give medical officials the level of comfort necessary to support a decision to move forward. This connection between vision and sentiment impacts not only our medical strategists at this time of pandemic, but also all of us in the regular course of daily living. How often, for example, do we hear something like, “I’m tired of seeing nothing but COVID-19 on the news. Seeing it is getting me down. I need to look at something else that will lift my spirits or calm my anxiety.”

This familiar experience brings to mind a question that has accompanied humanity throughout history: is there something that, upon seeing it, gives the profound satisfaction, the deep consolation, for which every heart yearns? The Gospel passage today answers that question. It is not the sight of *something* but of *someone* that gives total peace; that Someone is Our Heavenly Father. Having listened to Jesus speak of his Father, Philip asks: “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” The response of Jesus makes clear both that it is possible to see the Father and how we can. Immediately we can appreciate the importance of this for our present time. Anxiety, worry and restlessness abound; peace of heart escapes us. If the consolation we seek comes uniquely from seeing our Heavenly Father, then we need to understand well where He is to be seen.

To explore this with you, allow me to share a brief story. One day many years ago I was alone in a large Church, praying before the Blessed Sacrament. Suddenly I heard the voice of a young girl crying out, “Daddy! Daddy!” I looked up and saw three little girls running into the Church. They ranged in age from seven to three, and they were looking for their Daddy. I happened to know their father, who did some work at the Church. He had brought his daughters with him that day and somehow they had become separated from him. They were pretty frightened and were on the verge of tears. They needed to find their Daddy. So we all joined hands and I led them to the office nearby where their father was working. I still remember the look on their faces when they saw their father. All the fear vanished and they went back to their play. Whatever had troubled their little hearts was gone, replaced by joy and freedom. A few observations on what happened in this encounter can help us understand the response Jesus gives to Philip.

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father,” Jesus said. When I took those little girls to their Daddy, their gaze shifted away from me and onto their father. In contrast, Jesus, who leads us by the hand to the Father, teaches Philip that we see the Father precisely by keeping our sight fixed on him. This is due to his mysterious oneness with the Father: “I am in the Father and the Father is in me,” he said. This relationship between the Father and the Son is of such perfect unity that if we want to see the Father we need only contemplate the face of Christ.

This, of course, leads to the question, “But where do we see Jesus?” Again, we can approach the answer to this by reference to the little girls and their Daddy. It was not simply the sight of their father that gave them joy. What made them rejoice was seeing *from within the relationship* they had with him. Having lived with their father, they knew from daily experience that he loved them and would always protect them. From the lived experience of the relationship,

sight of their father brought joy. Had they experienced their father as neglectful and uncaring, seeing him would not likely have been as joyful an event.

We see Jesus from within the network of relationships we call the Church. The little girls were related by natural birth to their father, and then grew up day by day in that relationship such that they knew him intimately. Our relationship as children to our Heavenly Father has been granted to us by the re-birth we know as Baptism, which gives us a share in Christ's own relationship with his Father and communion with all other believers. By living as members of the Church, doing all that the Church does, we "grow up" within these relationships, daily contemplating the mystery of Our Lord, and are thus given an intimate knowledge of the Father - of his fidelity, love, and protection - so that when we see him in Christ, we are filled with joy.

In order to understand exactly what it means to grow up within our faith-based relationships, we can turn to the other two Scriptural texts. St. Peter teaches that the baptized are, first of all, people who worship God with the whole of their lives. They are, furthermore, those who give witness to their faith by proclaiming God's mighty deeds. In the passage from *Acts*, the ministry of the first deacons stands as a symbol of the responsibility incumbent on all disciples to serve the needy and preserve the unity of the Church. In short, we see in these passages the four nodes around which the network of ecclesial relations is woven and within which Christ is manifested: worship, witness, service and unity. Living within this complex of faith and ministry, we encounter Jesus and in him see the Father.

Now, when the little girls saw their father, the fear that held them captive was dispelled and they were free again to do what children do: have fun and play. When we see the Father in Christ, we, too, are set free from all that preoccupies us and weighs us down in order to do what the children of God do: engage in mission. At a time when the world needs urgently to see the Father and know the peace of heart that only such vision can give, our sacred duty is to offer worship, give witness, serve the needy and preserve unity, in order to show forth at this difficult time – and always - the face of our Lord, in whom alone the Father can be seen.

The sight of positive trends in the data will give to medical officers and to us a sense of hope that things might be changing for the better. That hope, though, is tenuous, as long as the virus remains with us and future waves are possible. By contrast, nothing can shake the hope that comes from seeing the Father in Christ. May the Holy Spirit help us to direct the world's gaze to Him.

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St. Joseph's Basilica (livestreamed)

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