

## **I am the Way, the Truth and the Life**

This Sunday is the fifth Sunday of Easter. In two weeks, we will celebrate the Ascension of the Lord to Heaven. After His resurrection, Jesus spent fifty days among His disciples teaching them and preparing them for when He would no longer be with them.

In the Gospel for this Sunday, Jesus tells His followers that He will be going ahead of them to prepare places for them in His Father's house. (Jn 14:2) He tells them that they know the way to the place where He is going. (Jn 14:4) When Thomas says that they do not know where He is going so how can they know the way, Jesus answers with the famous words: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.' (Jn 14: 6)

This is one of seven key 'I am' statements that Jesus utters in the Gospel of John. All of the statements are Jesus' way of teaching His disciples and reassuring them that, even when He is no longer with them, they can still follow His teachings and have life abundantly in this world and everlasting life in heaven.

'I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.' (Jn 6: 51) This harkens back to the Last Supper when Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist before His Passion and death.

'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.' (Jn 8: 12) Jesus tells His followers that they need not fear the darkness of this world but that He will always be there to light the way for them.

'I am the gate for the sheep.' (Jn 10: 7). 'I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.' (Jn 10: 11) Jesus uses the Good Shepherd metaphor to remind His disciples how much He cares for them even to the point of dying for them. He tells His followers that He will always lead them. These statements serve as a reminder of another Gospel passage when Jesus said that, if one of His sheep went astray, He would leave the other ninety-nine and find the one lost sheep.

'I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.' (Jn 11: 25-26) Again, Jesus reminds His disciples that, through faith in Him, they will be saved and have everlasting life in heaven.

'I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.' (John 15: 5) Jesus reminds His followers that, like the branches of a grapevine that draw their

nourishment from the central vine, they need to do the same. They need to draw their strength from their faith in Jesus. And, if they do so, they will do even greater things in the world than Jesus did.

Jesus' use of the words 'I am...' is not an accident or a coincidence. They are a reminder of His divinity because they hearken back to the words that God spoke to Moses when He told him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses expressed skepticism that the Israelites would accept him as their leader and he asked God what he should tell the Israelites when they asked him who made him their leader. God told Moses: 'I am who am.' Then He added: 'This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you.' (Ex. 3: 14)

'I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' In many ways, this statement is a summary of all of Jesus teachings. We know where we want to go and how to get there.

But in this world, there are many distractions. There are many voices, loud voices, telling us that we should not follow Jesus; that we are foolish to follow Him. When we feel ourselves faltering, we can take comfort and strength from the words of St. Peter: '...whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame. To you then who believe, He is precious; but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner. A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall. They stumble because they disobey the Word, as they were destined to do.' (1Peter 2: 6-8)

St. Ambrose, in his treatise *On Death as a Blessing*, put it this way: 'Let us set out, then, upon this way, holding fast to the truth and following in the footsteps of life. Christ is the way that leads us, the truth that strengthens us, and the life that restores us to life in Him.'