

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter – A – 20 April 2008 Visit of the Holy Father to the US

### LESSON: Only Christ Will Satisfy Our Hearts' Deepest Desires

From ancient times, philosophers have summed up the human condition as a **quest** to answer three fundamental questions: What should I **do**? What can I **know**? What can I **hope for**?

In response to the common-sense comment of doubting Thomas, Jesus Christ gives us the definitive answer to **each one** of these questions when he tells us that he is the way, the truth, and the life. Actually, Jesus doesn't just **give** the answers; he **is** the answers.



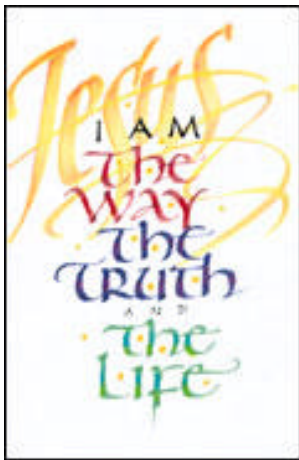
"I am the **way**" can translate into: "What should you do? **Follow me!** Do what I have done."

"I am the **truth**" means:

☞ "What can you know? You can know **everything**, if only you know **me**.

☞ "Knowing **me**, more and more every day, you know the **secret** behind the workings of the whole **universe** and the deepest yearnings of the **human heart**, because I made them both.

☞ I am the **eternal Word**, the very **Wisdom of God**."



"I am the **life**" means:

☞ "What can you hope for? In me, through me, you can hope for the **fullness of life** that you long for in the very **depths** of your soul.

☞ "You can hope for **your very own room** in my Father's house, in heaven - I have gone to prepare it for you.

☞ "In my Father's house all **sorrows** turn to **joy**, all **weakness** turns to **strength**, and **life** grows more **alive** as eternity unfolds.

Christ is truly the **living water** that quenches every thirst.

☞ He is truly the **light** that scatters every type of darkness.

☞ The **quest** of every man and woman to satisfy the heart's **deepest needs** is the quest to **seek his face**.

As St Augustine famously wrote, "Our hearts are **restless** until they **rest** in God."

### ILLUSTRATION: Pope Benedict at National Stadium

On Thursday, Fr. Thoms, myself & 8 parishioners from St. Jude & Sacred Heart had the privilege of traveling to Washington, DC to attend Pope Benedict XVI's first public Mass in the United States. He spoke to us, and to **ALL** American Catholics about our role in the world and in the Church. Allow me, today, to share with you *some* of what the Holy Father said in his homily:

“Peace be with you!” (Jn 20:19). With these, the first words of the Risen Lord to his disciples, I greet all of you in the joy of this Easter season. Before all else, I thank God for the blessing of being in your midst.

“In the exercise of my ministry as the Successor of Peter, I have come to America to confirm you, my brothers and sisters, in the faith of the Apostles (cf. Lk 22:32). I have come to proclaim



anew, as Peter proclaimed on the day of Pentecost, that Jesus Christ is Lord and Messiah, risen from the dead, seated in glory at the right hand of the Father, and established as judge of the living and the dead (cf. Acts 2:14ff.). I have come to repeat the Apostle's urgent call to conversion and the forgiveness of sins, and to implore from the Lord a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church in this country. As we have heard throughout this Easter season, the Church was born of the Spirit's gift of repentance and faith in the risen Lord. In

every age she is impelled by the same Spirit to bring to men and women of every race, language and people (cf. Rev 5:9) the good news of our reconciliation with God in Christ.

“I pray, then, that ... the presence of the Successor of Peter in your midst, will be an occasion for all Catholics to reaffirm their unity in the apostolic faith, to offer their contemporaries a convincing account of the hope which inspires them (cf. 1 Pet 3:15), and to be renewed in missionary zeal for the extension of God's Kingdom.



“The world needs this witness! Who can deny that the present moment is a crossroads, not only for the Church in America but also for society as a whole? It is a time of great promise, as we see the human family in many ways drawing closer together and becoming ever more interdependent. Yet at the same time we see clear signs of a disturbing breakdown in the very foundations of society: signs of alienation, anger and polarization on the part of many of our contemporaries; increased violence; a weakening of the moral sense; a coarsening of social relations; and a growing forgetfulness of God. The Church, too, sees signs of immense promise in her many strong parishes and vital movements, in the enthusiasm for the faith shown by so

many young people, in the number of those who each year embrace the Catholic faith, and in a greater interest in prayer and catechesis. At the same time she senses, often painfully, the ... troubling realization that many of the baptized, rather than acting as a spiritual leaven in the world, are inclined to embrace attitudes contrary to the truth of the Gospel.

“Here I wish to offer a special word of gratitude and encouragement to all those who have taken up the challenge of the Second Vatican Council, so often reiterated by Pope John Paul II, and committed their lives to the new evangelization.



I thank my brother Bishops, priests and deacons, men and women religious, parents, teachers and catechists. The fidelity and courage with which the Church in this country will respond to the challenges raised by an increasingly secular and materialistic culture will depend in large part upon your own fidelity in handing on the treasure of our Catholic faith. Young people need to be helped to discern the path that leads to true freedom: the path of a sincere and generous imitation of Christ, the path of commitment to justice and peace. Much progress has been made in developing solid

programs of catechesis, yet so much more remains to be done in forming the hearts and minds of the young in knowledge and love of the Lord. The challenges confronting us require a comprehensive and sound instruction in the truths of the faith. But they also call for cultivating a mindset, an intellectual ‘culture’, which is genuinely Catholic, confident in the profound harmony of faith and reason, and prepared to bring the richness of faith’s vision to bear on the urgent issues which affect the future of American society.

“Dear friends, my visit to the United States is meant to be a witness to ‘Christ our Hope’. Americans have always been a people of hope: your ancestors came to this country with the expectation of finding new freedom and opportunity, while the vastness of the unexplored wilderness inspired in them the hope of being able to start completely anew, building a new nation on new foundations. And the Christian virtue of hope -- the hope poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, the hope which supernaturally purifies and corrects our aspirations by focusing them on the Lord and his saving plan -- that hope has also marked, and continues to mark, the life of the Catholic community in this country.

“‘In hope we were saved!’ (Rom 8:24). As the Church in the United States gives thanks for the blessings of the past two hundred years, I invite you, your families, and every parish and religious community, to trust in the power of grace to create a future of promise for God’s people in this country. I ask you, in the Lord Jesus, to set aside all division and to work with joy to prepare a way for him, in fidelity to his word and in constant conversion to his will. Above all, I urge you to continue to be a leaven of evangelical hope in American society, striving to

bring the light and truth of the Gospel to the task of building an ever more just and free world for generations yet to come.

“Those who have hope must live different lives! (cf. Spe Salvi, 2). By your prayers, by the witness of your faith, by the fruitfulness of your charity, may you point the way towards that vast horizon of hope which God is even now opening up to his Church, and indeed to all humanity: the vision of a world reconciled and renewed in Christ Jesus, our Savior. To him be all honor and glory, now and forever. Amen.”

## **APPLICATION: Taking the Temperature of Our Faith**

As the Holy Father reminded us, **We all believe** that Jesus Christ is, as he told his Apostles during the Last Supper, the way, the truth, and the life.

If we didn't believe it, we wouldn't **be here** right now.

And yet, I believe the Holy Father is asking us – the Catholics of the United States – to **look** into our hearts and ask the question: how **firmly** do we believe that **Jesus** is the **way, truth, life & hope of the world?**

- ✍ Is our faith vibrant, strong, and bright, **like a sunrise**, or is it weak, malnourished, and hanging on in survival mode?
- ✍ The **stronger** our faith in Christ, the more our lives will be marked by **wisdom, courage, purity, peace of heart, and magnanimity** - like all the **saints**.
- ✍ The **weaker** our faith, the more we experience **discouragement, frustration, boredom, slavery to vice, and anxiety**.

Perhaps we could make use of **three “thermometers”** to take the **temperature** of our faith.

First, do we spend **quality time each day in personal prayer?**

- ✍ Our friendship with Christ cannot be vibrant if we never spend time with him.

Second, do we make **frequent use of the sacrament of confession?**

- ✍ All the saints have a **keen sense** of how their selfish tendencies and sinfulness **wounds** the heart of Christ, even in little infidelities.
- ✍ The Holy Father goes to confession every week. Your priests and religious sisters go to confession regularly – it is an indispensable part of our own spiritual journeys. Once a year is **not** enough!
- ✍ We are called to this sacrament regularly to **heal** those wounds – to live and experience the truth that “Christ is our hope!” – no matter our sins and failings.



Third, how deeply do we **long** to receive Jesus in **Holy Communion**?



- ✍ If Communion has become just a routine or an **empty ritual**, it could be a sign that our faith is withering.

Today, Jesus is **inviting** us to **check up** on our faith.

- ✍ He wants to help us make whatever **adjustments** are necessary in order to be **better Christians** - the kind who experience the **joy of the risen Christ** and aren't afraid to **spread** that joy to others.
- ✍ As we continue with this Mass, **let's accept that invitation.**

- ✍ Let's heed Pope Benedict's call to us as Catholics in America "to trust in the power of grace to create a future of promise for God's people in this country."
- ✍ "to be a leaven of evangelical hope in American society, striving to bring the light and truth of the Gospel to the task of building an ever more just and free world for generations yet to come."

"In hope we were saved!" (Rom 8:24). "Those who have hope must live different lives!" (cf. Spe Salvi, 2) Does our Faith, our Hope – does our knowledge of Jesus as "the way, the truth and the life" truly make us different people? A leaven – changing our world, our culture, our country through the witness of our lives?

