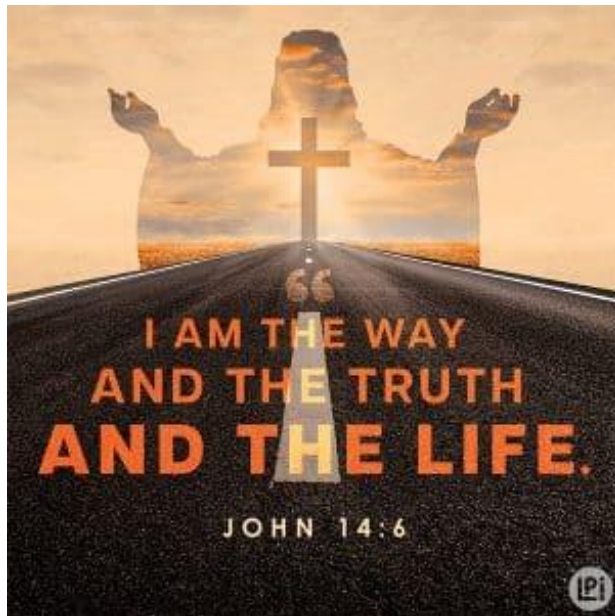


## Homily for Sunday, May 3, 2026



Whenever we gather for Eucharist, our first reading we listen to always comes from the Hebrew Scriptures, what we traditionally called the Old Testament. The exception to this is during the 50 days of Easter, where the first reading comes from the Acts of the Apostles. Acts tells us of how the Church came to birth when it no longer had Jesus physically present to them. The early

Christians truly relied on the ongoing presence of Jesus in his Spirit which he promises us just as much as he promised those 1<sup>st</sup> century-Christians. We need the Spirit today just as much as they did then.

It's easy to get the impression, when we hear stories from the Acts of the Apostles, that everything was lovey-dovey. The first Christians apparently sold their possessions, gave the money to the needy, broke bread in memory of Jesus, sang hymns to the Lord, and their numbers grew by the thousands. Naively, we might think it was smooth sailing, and the early Christians lived in agreement and harmony all the time. This was not the case at all. We can't go back, as some archconservative Catholics insist we should, to some romanticized period in the Church's history falsely thinking, that if we do so, all our troubles will go away. That's the world of nostalgia. It's a world of avoiding and escaping the challenges

before us. In that world we never have to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to us in this place and in this time. The Holy Spirit is both with us and just a little bit ahead us at all times. While we should learn from the past, the Spirit is always calling us forward into a future full of hope.

So, the early Christians had their share of problems that divided their communities just as we are often divided. Our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Hellenists were complaining against Hebrews. The Hebrews were Jews living inside of Jerusalem, while the Hellenists were Jews who made up the Diaspora, the scattered Jews living outside of Jerusalem. These scattered Jews, the Hellenists, tended to speak Greek and embrace Greek culture. They lived in a pluralistic society. The Hebrews spoke Aramaic or Hebrew and tended to live within the walls of Jerusalem. They were suspicious and tended to look down on anyone else who didn't live in Jerusalem or who didn't speak Hebrew. So, there was this split with the Jewish community between the insiders (Hebrews) and the outsiders (Hellenists). As many of them became Christians, they held onto this division. The poor and the widows who lived inside Jerusalem were taken care of way better than the widows and poor who lived outside. So, right away in the early Church you already had division—the rich and the poor, those cared for and those neglected, the worthy and the unworthy—a two class system. This was not the Church Jesus envisioned.

The answer was not to come up with more or better laws. The solution was to discern what the needs of the people were and how the Spirit would be guiding them to respond to those needs. For Peter, the leader of the pack, laws written on

stone are not foundational; Jesus is the corner stone. In their discernment, they chose seven Greek-speaking people to serve the Greek-speaking widows and poor who lived outside Jerusalem. If it was Christ's Church, it could not and should not be a two-class system.

The Gospel passage we have today is taken from the Last Supper. It's what we call the farewell discourse. After washing his disciples' feet, over the next four chapters, Jesus says "goodbye". It's the longest farewell speech in history. The disciples are troubled by Jesus' upcoming departure. They love him and they are bothered by the fact that he will no longer be with them. Love can endure temporary separation but it cannot survive permanent loss. He tells them that he goes to prepare a place for them and, in time, he will come to take them where he is going.

This reading, about there being many rooms in the Father's house, is proclaimed at so many funerals. Rightly so, but I don't see it as only pointing us to our ultimate home after we die. Jesus says, "I go before you to prepare a place for you." I have heard those words in one form or another all my life, and they have always brought me comfort. When a spouse dies, I think Jesus goes ahead to prepare the surviving spouse for the next phase of their life. When you are anxious about starting a new job, and wonder if you'll fit in with these new colleagues, I believe the Spirit goes ahead of you to prepare the ground. Whenever you have to make a big decision in life, pray that the Spirit will go ahead of you and put good people on your path so that when you get there you'll see it as confirmation that you made the right decision. Jesus says, "Do not let your

hearts be troubled.” We may go down in history as the anxiety generation. What troubles us, often, is not being able to predict, much less control, our future. Jesus tells us not to let our hearts be troubled. Our future is in the hands of God who not only walks with us here and now but who also has gone ahead to prepare a place for us. Spirit is with us and simultaneously just a little ahead preparing the way.

There is room for everyone in God’s house even when we fail to make room for others. The insiders in Jerusalem really felt challenged and threatened that they might have to share their resources with widows and the poor whom they considered outsiders. There are no second class citizens in God’s kingdom. That’s the kingdom that needs to permeate our world where there are still insiders and outsiders, unfortunately. Jokingly, I like to say to non-Catholics, “There is room in the Father’s house for you just as much as there is room for us Catholics. Unfortunately, your room will be next to the noisy elevator and the ice machine.”

Everyone who seeks the way, the truth, and the life already is assured of a place in the house of love. That’s how big God’s love is.

The early Church gave us the pattern. They needed to discern two things: the needs of those around them and how the Spirit was encouraging them to respond to those needs. If they could do that, they would be able to break down walls that divided people. They saw Jesus as the living stone, and if they cooperated with the Spirit, God would make them into living stones as well. If Jesus did it for them 2000 years ago, he’ll do it for us.

~Fr. Phil