

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Personal Trust in Jesus**     Fifth Sunday of Easter/A     May 18, 2014     9:00 AM  
Acts 6:1-7; 1 Pt 2:4-9; **Jn 14:1-12** (Listening to Jesus and seeing him work was an experience of the Father.)

**“You have faith in God; have faith in me also.”**

This dialogue that we heard this morning is taken from the Gospel according to John, and it is situated **right before Jesus departs from the upper room after the Last Supper**. It is a time of turmoil for all concerned. **The disciples are worried and anxious** about what’s going to happen. **Jesus is hurt and disappointed in them** because they don’t comprehend what he is trying to tell them; and, rather bluntly, they are acting stupidly.

John, who is the beloved disciple, is behind this story, and he wants to give us a human picture that reflects all of our lives at some point, that is, **people who love each other but who don’t know how to communicate**. Very few of us have not been in that situation. So at this very moment Jesus says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God and have faith in me also.” Of course they have faith in God, but Jesus is asking for something more. **He is asking them to have a very personal trust in him**, even though he has already told them that he is going to undergo some very great passion, tragedy.

St. John Paul II always stressed that we human beings are religious by nature and that we need to respect the religious beliefs of all people, that that is the most basic human right. But Christianity offers something more than simply belief in God, and that’s what this is about. John the evangelist wants us to look at what is really distinctive about believing in Jesus and trusting in him. Or another way of putting that is: What does it mean to “have faith in me also”? **How does faith in Christ enrich and expand our lives? And how do we share that with others that don’t have that kind of faith?** That’s the first part of the gospel story.

The second part is a rather **robust expression of Jesus’ divinity**. **“If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.”** Both Jesus’ words and his deeds are not mere human words and human deeds, but come from the Father. This is very challenging for a lot of people, including those who call themselves Christians, but especially Jews, Muslims, and other so-called theists. This is a very extraordinary claim. But it is also challenging to all those who

want to experience God as Philip did. That's the meaning of the statement: "Just show us the Father, and that will be enough." What he meant was just let us experience God. And Jesus' response to that was one of sore disappointment because as he explains **listening to him and seeing him work was an experience of the Father.**

And this leads to another very good question. **How many people are desperately looking for what is right in front of them in plain sight? How many people really want to experience God and yet actually God is there right in front of them? And how might we help their search or perhaps our own search?**

The final issue brought up is more implied than stated, but it's very important: that is that Jesus' trustworthiness and **his fidelity in showing us the Father did not in any way preserve him or protect him from the scary and vicious face of evil.** The Letter to the Hebrews puts it this way: **"Son though he was, Jesus learned obedience from what he suffered."** This is really the way in which Jesus challenges people's belief in God, including Christians' belief in God, because most people think of God as some all-powerful, supreme, ever controlling being. This very thought is completely incompatible with Jesus' life, with Jesus' teachings, with Jesus' example. **Trusting in Jesus is trusting in someone who accompanies us in suffering, but does not protect us from it.** And seeing the Father in him means seeing a **God** who is not invulnerable or distant or detached, but one who is so concerned and who cares so much that he is **drawn into solidarity and communion with those who suffer.** And that is the mystery we celebrate when we gather for the Eucharist.