

Reflection on the Gospel - Easter 5A
(John 14:1-14)

-Veronica Lawson RSM

“Take from my heart all painful anxiety” is a gospel inspired prayer. It is the prayer of Catherine McAuley, the first Sister of Mercy. Like Jesus, Catherine knew in her being that a troubled heart is an ever present possibility: we deal with one problem and along comes another. When we don’t have any serious worries in the present, we are often anxious about the future. There is a difference, of course, between having worries and having a troubled heart. The difference lies in how we deal with the inevitable problems and challenges that come our way.

Freedom from anxiety is the constant message of the gospels. “Do not let your hearts be troubled” is Jesus’ word to his friends in John’s gospel. The verb, here in passive mood (“be troubled”), is used of Jesus’ spirit when he finds his friend Mary and her companions weeping over the death of Lazarus (11:33). It means literally to shake or to stir up. Jesus is really shaken by grief in that situation. As he faces his own death, he does not want his friends to be troubled of heart or spirit. He speaks here from his own experience.

Jesus points out the path to an untroubled heart: “Believe in God, believe also in me.” The faith of the disciples is to be grounded in his care for them both in the present and into the future: “I go to prepare a place for you... I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also”. In this context, Jesus makes three claims: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” The prologue to the gospel, which functions as an overture to the whole work, has introduced the notion of the glorified Jesus as “full of grace and *truth*” and the bringer of “grace and *truth*”(1:14, 17). He is the *life* that is the light of all (1:4). As the gospel unfolds, we learn that he is the bread of *life*, even the resurrection and the *life*. His claim to be “the *way*” is foreshadowed in the parable of the door or the gate: “I am the gate of the sheepfold.”

If the disciples know Jesus, then they also know the way to God whom Jesus images in tender parental terms as “Father”. He speaks of their mutual indwelling. If Philip, his persistent questioner, does not believe this, then maybe he can believe on account of the “works” of Jesus, works that are also the works of God. Those who believe have the power to do these and even greater works. This seems extraordinary, but is really just a matter of believing with untroubled hearts that the power comes from God - as next Sunday’s gospel will tell us.