

Way Truth Life
5th Sunday of Easter (A)
(Jn 14:1-12)

Every people has its Creed, Code, and Cult. Creed refers to the tenets of faith, the set of beliefs. The Code (of conduct) is a set of moral standards or values. And Cult is the system of rituals which celebrate, express, and live out that faith in worship.

The Christian **Creed** is summarized in the Apostle's Creed which is used in the baptismal ceremony, and the Nicene Creed which is recited every Sunday at Mass. Our beliefs are handed on from the Sacred Scriptures and Apostolic Tradition, and articulated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and other decrees from popes and Church councils. It centers on: 1) the Holy Trinity, whereby we proclaim God to be One in being or essence, but Three in person or communal relationship; 2) the Incarnation of the Second Divine Person as Man in Jesus; 3) the Redemption by which the Son of God offered his life on the Cross in Atonement for man's sin in order to obtain his salvation; and 4) the continuation of this mystery in the life of the Church by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The Christian **Code** begins with the 10 Commandments of the moral law as given by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai, but it is fulfilled and expanded by the teachings of Jesus, especially those in the Sermon on the Mount. It includes the Beatitudes, the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, and the Fruits of the Holy Spirit. Its special emphasis is charity and-self sacrifice, and the sacredness of life.

The Christian **Cult** is found in the celebration of the 7 Sacraments, especially the Sacrament of the Eucharist through the Holy Mass. The rituals of our worship derive from the Old Testament Synagogue service, Passover, and Temple liturgy in Jerusalem. They have been fulfilled in the priestly activity of Jesus, who offered himself as the unblemished Lamb, a sacrifice for sin on the altar of the Cross. In the early Church, some variations in ritual were established by individual Apostles when they founded churches in different parts of the world, and these are known as the different Rites of the Catholic Church. We belong to the Latin Rite, founded in Rome by the apostles Peter and Paul.

In all three areas of Christian religion, Jesus is the standard and measure. He tells Thomas, "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*" (Jn 14:6). This distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. Jesus is not merely a teacher of the truth, proposing doctrines for belief, the way prophets normally act as mouthpieces of God; he *is* the Truth. Jesus does not merely provide good example of conduct for men to follow, the way gurus and guides show people how to live; he *is* the Way.

And Jesus does not merely lead the people in worship and blessing, he *is* the blessing which comes down from heaven and gives Eternal Life.

Christianity is more than learning a set of beliefs, observing a certain code of conduct, and going through the motions of certain religious actions and devotional practices. It is above all a living relationship and union with Christ, in which all these things take place. Christians are “other Christs,” members of Christ’s Body in whom he the Head is present and active. It is not merely that we believe his teachings, follow his example, and worship the Father in his name; it is more that he lives and acts in his disciples, by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which is his own spirit.

Following Thomas’ question to Jesus at the Last Supper about the Way (Jn 14:5), Philip asks the next question about the Father: “*Lord, show us the Father*” (Jn 14:8). Jesus proceeds to explain the beginning of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, that fundamental part of the Creed of Christianity. God is One, but the One God is three distinct Persons bound in the mystery of love. The Trinity begins with the relationship of the Father and the Son, and Jesus explains to Philip that “*the Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father*” (Jn 14:10). Therefore, if you have seen the Son, you have by definition seen the Father, since it is the Father who lives and acts in the Son. It is not possible to separate them, pure love makes them absolutely one. The Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity “mutually indwell” each other, beginning with the Father and the Son.

This mystery of God’s inner life, is then translated by the Incarnate Son into the life of the Church. As the Last Supper discourse continues, Jesus will go on to explain to his disciples that, “*as I am in my Father, so you are in me, and I in you*” (cf. Jn 14:20, 17:20-23). It is by means of the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, that this will be accomplished. Which is why Jesus tells the apostles they will do even greater things than he, once he goes to the Father (Jn 14:12). Following his departure, i.e. his death, resurrection, and ascension, he will send from the Father the “Paraclete,” to be with the Church, and reveal fully the mystery of its divine life (Jn 14:15-20).

This is what is accomplished by the sacramental life of the Church: the mutual indwelling of Christ and his disciples, after the model of the Holy Trinity itself. Baptism is not merely an external symbolic gesture, it is a baptism “into” the very death and Resurrection of Jesus (Rm 6:3). Likewise, the Eucharist is no mere remembrance of the Last Supper, it is the very reality of the “two becoming

one flesh”; the disciple becoming one with the master in a union far beyond anything accomplished or imagined by any other religion anywhere (cf. Jn 6:57).¹

In the early Church, before they called themselves Catholic, even before they called themselves Christian, the followers of Jesus called their religion “The Way” (cf Acts 9:2, 18:26, 22:4, 24:14, 24:22). It is a beautiful description, deriving from the words spoken by the Lord at the Last Supper. Others, on hearing this description and meeting Christians for the first time, naturally assume it refers to the way “of” Christ, a set of precepts, beliefs, and rituals taught to them by Jesus of Nazareth. But as the convert begins to inquire and learn more about the Christian life, and become Christian through Baptism, he begins to understand that Christianity is not the simply the way “of” Christ, but rather the Way which “is” Christ.

The saints, then, are not simply great examples of good moral conduct and personal holiness. Nor are they necessarily the ones who are able to learn, understand, and explain well the doctrines of Christianity. It is much deeper than that. The saints are those who allow Christ to live in them, and shine through their life and death (cf Jn 15:7-8). The great martyrs, then, such as the recent Coptic Christians who were beheaded on the beach in Libya by ISIS in 2015, give eloquent witness to the Truth. They do not die because they are necessarily morally perfect, or doctrinally educated. They die simply because in them is Christ the Light, who is hated by the world and the devil (Jn 15:18ff.). They *are* Christians, and that is enough. One of them, Matthew Ayairga, died as a Christian that day, though he had not even yet been baptized, or had the opportunity to study the creed. “Their God is my God,” he proclaimed, acknowledging the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.

¹ Jn 6:57 is the culminating verse of the Eucharistic discourse, which explains the final goal for why Jesus will give his flesh and blood as real food and drink: “*As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me.*” The Eucharist accomplishes the mutual indwelling of Christ and his disciples, which he already experiences with the Father.