

Jesus: The Way, The Truth, and The Life

I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me. ~ John 14:6

EVERYTHING that Jesus said while on earth has a special, divine importance. He had so little time among us that he made every moment, every word, every act count. He obviously wanted us to learn from him all that he had come to share with us. Every word that proceeds from the mouth of Jesus, therefore, has salvific significance (see Mt 4:4; Dt 8:3). What, then, does he mean — what does he really say to us — when he proclaims that he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life? By these words, he personifies in himself three things, each of which bears special import for us to whom they are addressed.

“I Am the Way.” Hearing these words, the mind asks: the way to what? Jesus’ life gives us the answer. He came among us to save us and to bring us back into friendship with his Father in Heaven. In the Creed we say, “for us men and for our salvation he came down from Heaven.” Jesus is the way to the Father, for he and the Father are one. No one comes to the Father except by Jesus, who says to us repeatedly, “follow me” (Mt 4:19; Mt 8:22; Mk 8:34; Mk 10:21; Lk 5:27; Jn 1:43; Jn 12:26) and tells us to “learn from me” (Mt 11:29).

Jesus sets himself up as our leader and our model. He wants us to imitate him and follow him in all that he has said and done. St. Paul was keenly aware of this message of Jesus: “Be imitators of me, as



*The Good Shepherd, by Domenico Mastroianni,
1876-1962*

“By the perfection of the human life he lived in our midst, he demonstrated for us what we can do, what every man and woman is and can be.”

I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1).

Jesus’ example is abundantly clear. “[L]ove one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12). “[T]ake up [your] cross” (Lk 9:23). Jesus expects us to be like him. He is committed to the will of God, yet mindful of his fellow creatures whose human nature he shares. Like him, we are to do all things well (see Mk 7:37). Like him, we are to not only pass on the word, the Good News of the Gospel, but also to live it in our concern for the problems of others: to relieve embarrassment as did Jesus at Cana (see Jn 2:1-11), to visit the sick and help heal their anxieties (see Lk 4:40), to help others with marriage problems (see Jn 4:15-29), to assist parents in caring for and educating children (see Mk 10:13-16).

He expects us to imitate him in doing even distasteful and repugnant things: to associate with and even dine with those who hate or disagree with us (see Lk 7:36-48), to be helpful to those who are poor or rejected by society (see Mt 11:5; Lk 17:12-19) or who are burdened with guilt and sin (see Mt 9:11; Lk 19:1-10), to befriend those who are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (see Mk 6:34), to forgive those who harm or torment us (see Lk 23:34).

The “Way” cries out to us: “The harvest [of souls] is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Mt 9:37). In fact, the laborers are still all too few. We

must ask him for the grace to be his laborers and to go, like him, into the harvesting fields.

By his words as well as by his example, Jesus has taught us how to live our lives here on earth. He has shown us the way to holiness and he calls us, each and all, to this same holiness. By the perfection of the human life he lived in our midst, he demonstrated for us what we can do, what every man and woman is and can be. He has given us himself as the Way to *“be perfect, as [our] Heavenly Father is perfect”* (Mt 5:48).

“I Am the Truth.” Not only is Jesus to be our Way. He also came to dispel our ignorance, our doubts, our despair, our slavery. He yearned to set us free from sin, from worldly cares and preoccupations, and to make us aware of the only really important and vital priorities in life. He says: *“For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth”* (Jn 18:37). For it is truth, and truth only, that can make us free (see Jn 8:32). And he says that he is Truth. It is a tragedy that Pilate, who asked the right question of Jesus, *“What is truth?”* (Jn 18:38) did not wait to get the answer from Truth himself. He was too concerned with transient things and, as a result, remained blind, trapped, and fettered by ignorance. This was clearly revealed when he brought forth the bloodied Jesus and cried out to the mob: *“Behold the man!”* (Jn 19:5). Had he been aware of the truth, he would have shouted: *“Behold God!”* and released him.

The human mind seeks truth; it wants to be sure, to have certainty. Truth is freedom from error and falsehood. When we acknowledge that Jesus is Truth, we free ourselves from the need to search else-

where for what we need for happiness both here and hereafter. Confirmed in faith that Jesus is Truth, we can believe in him and follow what he reveals to us with abandonment and trust, confident that we are doing well, heading in the right direction, and eventually will end up where we want to be, forever — and we will be with him.

“I Am the Life.” Even more than being the Way

and the Truth, Jesus is also the Life — our life. *“In him was life, and the life was the light of men”* (Jn 1:4). No amount of effort on the part of human beings can bring life or light to the darkness and shadow of death with which sin has engulfed us. Jesus, by coming among us, through his free acceptance of suffering and death, and by his

Resurrection, gives us boundless hope and the promise of new life. *“I am the resurrection and the life,”* he says, *“he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live”* (Jn 11:25).

In Scripture, light and life are inseparable. Centuries before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah held out hope when he said, *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined”* (Is 9:2). Jesus proclaims that he is the fulfillment of this prophecy: *“I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have*

the light of life” (Jn 8:12).

Jesus is unbelievably insistent that he is life and that we must have his life within us. His life must be ours, so that through abiding in us he will increase in us and we will decrease (see Jn 3:30) as we become more like him, so that he can present us to his Father as *“other Christs.”* Jesus is deliberate in the way he wants to be our life. He wants us to par-

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DAVID CHARLES PHOTOGRAPHY

Ceremonial washing of the feet during the Holy Thursday Mass, recalling Jesus washing the feet of the Apostles at the Last Supper as a sign that leaders in the Church are to be servants to those they lead

“Jesus is unbelievably insistent that he is life and that we must have his life within us.”



Christ's exhortation to the twelve Apostles, by James Tissot, 1856-1902

take of him, to be our food, to receive him totally: Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. When he spoke of how he intended to be our life, his hearers left him, turned their backs on him who had just miraculously fed them with a few loaves and fish, saying, *“This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?”* (Jn 6:60). Yet he means precisely what he said: *“I am the bread of life”* (Jn 6:35); *“[h]e who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him”* (Jn 6:56).

Jesus, as our life, makes himself available to us for all time. He wants to be with us, to dwell in us, to be our life: *“I came that [you] may have life, and have it abundantly”* (Jn 10:10). He is so wrapped up in love, love of us, that he willingly gives his very self to us. Knowing this, we should yearn for his Presence within us. There is no better nor more intimate time for this union with God, our tremendous Lover himself, than in Holy Communion, the sacrament of

the Eucharist. The most precious moments of our lives is the time when we have Jesus, our way, our truth, and our life, actually present in our bodies. He is in us as he was in the womb of his Mother. This is the moment of Heaven on earth, of Divine Life wrapped in human flesh — but, this time, it is our flesh. Our hearts should be caught up in ecstasy. We have every reason to cry out in utter joy: *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”* (Rom 8:35). *“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom 8:37-39).

(CCC 459, 1696-1698, 1741, 2466, 2470)