

## EASTER 6, May. 26, 2019, Year C

- Two college students drive into the mountains for a weekend hiking trip. Both enjoy camping outdoors, and they take appropriate equipment and supplies with them. They are heading for a place unknown to them, where not many people have been before. And so, in addition to their tent, sleeping bags, and cooking gear, they have a good map and a working compass. With these tools, they are confident that they will find their way through the wilderness.
- Perhaps because they were up late writing term papers the night before, both of them are tired. During the long afternoon drive, even their cups of coffee fail to keep them fully alert. As the road winds in and out of canyons, rising rock walls deflect the low sun and create deep shadows. Coming around one particularly sharp turn in a switch-back, the SUV skids on gravel, and the vehicle veers off the road. Down an embankment they slide, and slam into a tree. Suddenly everything is white and dusty - the airbags have exploded, saving them from serious injury.
- Now they have a real problem. They are in a remote area where their cell phones don't work; the SUV is ruined; and it's getting dark. Of course, they could just stay where they are. They could survive on their packed food and water, and could sleep in what's left of the SUV. But neither of them wants to do that. The alternative is to walk out, and try to find a way back to civilization. Aside from food and water bottles they stuff into their day-packs, they have two things that can help them. They have a map, and they have a compass. In other words, they have the right tools to hike out safely. And so, they also have a real opportunity.
- But this is where things actually go from bad to worse. In this moment, each of them has a strong idea about the right way out of this remote place. The problem is, they do not agree about the way forward. Being tired and stressed, and having contrasting personalities, they respond to their

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*situation in very different ways.* As a result, they head off in *separate directions, one with the map, the other holding the compass.*

- At the moment, this seems like a sensible solution for two people who disagree about their predicament. *But the decision proves near-fatal for both of them.* Of course, *a good map and a working compass are valuable* in a situation like this. But, paradoxically, *neither tool is of real use without the other.* This is why: *A good map shows where everything is, including ways in and out of the area.* But it *does not* tell you *where* you should go. Whereas *a working compass always points to magnetic north,* and therefore provides *direction.* But it won't tell you *where you are.*
- *So, problems come from trying to use a map without a compass, or in trying to use a compass without a map.* For even if *a map* shows a way out, it's useless *unless you follow it correctly,* and go in the *right* direction. And, *by itself, a working compass can be unhelpful.* For even if you consistently head straight in the same direction, *it may be the wrong direction.* Which may only lead you deeper *into* wilderness, and *not out* of it.
- Most of all, *refusing collaboration* with the other person *reading the map* or *holding the compass* diminishes their prospects. For each of the two students is likely to remain lost while, *on his own,* trying to interpret *what can be learned from a map or a compass.* (pause)
- *At the Last Supper, before arrest and death takes Jesus away, he promises that he will return.<sup>1</sup>* He knows he is launching the disciples on a mission-journey of faith. But *they will not be without guidance.* Nevertheless, despite Jesus' promises, *they do not perceive this truth at first.* Even though he tells them, "*You know the way to the place where I am going.*" This prompts Thomas to protest that he *doesn't know the way.* Jesus then tells them that *he is the way,* as well as the truth and the life.

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- Despite this, Jesus' death leaves the disciples feeling like they have swerved off *the way* on which they have been traveling, and as if they have come to a dead stop. Then, gradually after his resurrection, they come to realize that **he has given them two helpful things** ~ two things to accompany their journey through the *wilderness of a very new world*.
- **Jesus gives them something like a map**, a map formed by his sayings and the memory of his works. He who is *The Way*, gives them *a map of The Way*. This map reminds them of their relationship with him, and of his relationship with what God has been doing through *both him and them*. Their challenge is to connect this *map of his sayings and works*, with the unfamiliar terrain of the new world around them.
- But as he has promised, **Jesus also gives them something like a compass**, which is the guiding Holy Spirit, who always points in the same unwavering and godly direction. Like a compass, the Holy Spirit will help them follow a straight path. *But*, they still need to know *The Way they are to head*, and the route they need to follow.
- And so, like them, **we need to rely upon the teaching Scriptures, as well as upon the guiding Holy Spirit**, in order to find our way forward in life. For **Jesus has given us two intertwined and inseparable gifts** that come together as *one*: this is 'the *Scripture-shaped Tradition of Spirit-guided reasoning*.'<sup>2</sup>
- Our Prayerbook Catechism teaches us that **we understand the map when helped by the compass, and appreciate the compass while learning from the map**. Or, as the Catechism literally puts it: "we understand the meaning of the Bible by the help of the Holy Spirit..." And, "we recognize truths to be taught by the Holy Spirit when they are in accord with the Scriptures."<sup>3</sup> Most of all, **we need each other**, to discern these things *together* so we can move forward on a common mission. (pause)

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- *Just like the disciples*, we have been given two things to guide us and help us on this mission. *Like them, we have been given the map which records Jesus' sayings and his works*, a map with which and through which the terrain of his living presence is still discerned. And, *like them, we have also been given the compass of the guiding Holy Spirit*, who continues in an *unwavering and godly way* to point the way forward, for the mission into which we have been grafted.
- *Throughout history*, Christians have gotten in trouble when we've '*gone it alone*,' in *self-convinced journeys* toward ends we feel called to pursue. And Christians have gotten in trouble when we have tried to use *either the map, or the compass gift, on its own*. That is, when we have tried to use the Christ-map recording his sayings and his works, or the guiding compass of the Holy Spirit, *each on its own*, and *without* the *correcting* insight provided by the other.
- *What Jesus promises us in our Gospel today becomes the key*. For Jesus promises us the gifts that enable our participation in what becomes the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. The Son of God, and the Holy Spirit, become like the two great hands of the Father, nurturing and guiding us, as the Church, as we fulfill God's continuing mission in the world.



James Tissot, *The Last Sermon of our Lord*



James Tissot, *The Last Supper*

**John 14:23-29**

Jesus said to Judas (not Iscariot), "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. **But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.** Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, **'I am going away, and I am coming to you.'** If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe."

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The readings appointed for this day are:

Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5; John 14:23–29

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See John 14:1ff, including today's Gospel reading, where Jesus' promise to return is coupled with the promise that his followers will receive the gift of the Spirit of truth.

<sup>2</sup> This is more likely what Richard Hooker had in mind when referring to Scripture, Reason and Tradition in an integrated way rather than in the disconnected way in which they are commonly mentioned these days.

<sup>3</sup> See BCP:853-4.