

Some of you might remember that I once hiked an ancient Christmas pilgrimage to visit the relics of St James called the Camino de Santiago. The name of the pilgrimage literally translates to the “Way to Santiago,” but it is a little bit of a misnomer because the Way is not a single route but multiple routes that come from all over Spain to converge at the Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela. The image of this “Way of St. James” came to my mind as I was reflecting on that enigmatic phrase from today’s Gospel when Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

We have heard this phrase so many times that we often take it for granted without reflecting on it and realizing just how profound this statement truly is. We need to take some time to dig into this statement to realize how important it is for our lives. If you recall, Jesus gave this statement during His famous Last Supper discourse as He celebrated the Passover with His disciples in Jerusalem. Much like with Santiago de Compostela, Jewish pilgrims journeyed from all over Israel on different trails which all converged in one place, the Temple of God in Jerusalem. I think that Jesus was drawing on this common experience when He called Himself the “way.” Every single path to the Father, no matter where it begins, converges in one place and one place only, Jesus Christ.

In ancient times, as far back as the second century, this led to Christians making a very bold statement. “Extra ecclesiam nulla salus.” Outside the Church, there is no salvation. One would think that in our modern age, that the Church would have reformulated this statement, and yet the Church has restated this simple truth again and again, even in our own lifetimes. Outside the Church, there is no salvation.

But this brings an important question... what about those Christians who are not in union with us? What about non-Christians... Jews and Muslims and Buddhists? Are they denied salvation? In response to this question, the Church simply says no, no they are not necessarily denied salvation. In God’s mercy, there

are possibly other paths that can lead to salvation, but no matter which path is used, all paths must pass through Jesus Christ. No matter who it is, no matter what religion they follow, if they are to be saved it must be through the grace of Jesus Christ for only Jesus Christ is “the way.”

Jesus also tells us that He is “the truth.” This is just as bold a claim, if not bolder, as Jesus’ claim that He is “the way.” We live in an age dominated by relativism, dominated by the belief that truth is arbitrary and that we can define our own truth. We see this play out everywhere in our own society as people seek to redefine marriage and gender and many other things that have in the past never been called into question. As a Christian, this can be scary as we are forced to contemplate a fundamental question. Is there such a thing as absolute truth? And if there is, where is it and how do we find it?

Jesus answers this question clearly and definitively for us when He says, “I am the truth.” As Catholics, we should not be scared to wrestle with the question of truth because we know that all truth leads to God. For anyone who honestly seeks truth, all truth... truth about science, truth about beauty, truth about love, truth about human nature... all truth leads to God.

And yet, often we do not seek truth honestly through cold intellectual rigor. Instead, we seek truth through our hearts, labelling as truth that which we love. No matter what we love, whether it is ourselves or pleasure or some agenda, we will redefine truth to support that which we want to love... that to which we want to give our lives. So, we will never fully understand that Jesus is “the truth” unless we truly come to believe that the truth which we seek is only found in Jesus... until we seek to have a relationship with Him and love Him. Only then will we learn that truth is not some abstract thing but a living person, Jesus Christ.

And finally, Jesus says that He is “the life.” Coming out of the mouth of a Jew, this was the height of blasphemy because only God is the author of life. For Jesus to say that life can be found in and through Him was to set Himself up as being a Creator equal to God. This is especially interesting in our modern age when science is trying to make itself a creator like God.

Science is seeking to create life, to manipulate life, to extend life. And yet, despite its best efforts, science cannot create life out of nothing. Only God is able to do this. All science does is manipulate the life that God created to change it and remake it in its own image. And despite its best efforts, science cannot now or ever eradicate death but only delay its inevitability. Jesus’s statement that He is “the life” is just as relevant today as it was two thousand years ago. For in the end, there is nothing worth living for but Jesus because only Jesus can give us life... only Jesus can restore life to our broken souls and remake us in God’s image... only Jesus can break the chains of death and allow us to live eternally.

Only in Jesus will we find the way, the truth, and the life. We are all pilgrims on the journey of life and no matter how varied the “Way” might be that we walk as individuals, they all lead to one place. If we want to find the way to the Father, the way to heaven, our path can only lead us through His Son, Jesus Christ. Any other path only serves to lead us astray into misery. If we want to find truth in our lives, it can only be found by a relationship with Jesus Christ for He is the Truth whom we seek. Any other truth that we might live for, no matter how attractive it might seem, will only leave us trapped alone in isolation. If we want to have life in abundance, we must turn to Jesus because He is the only one that can give our lives meaning and birth us into eternal life. Despite all the seeming paths out there, there is no other true way in heaven or on earth for only Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.