

*“Comforting or Confronting: A Challenging Choice”*  
John 14:1-14

*Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

Let your light shines in our mind and heart, as we listen to your word from the Scripture and from our meditation. Amen.

For the past three 3 days, our city hosted the Pope and provided a warm and cordial welcome in his dual capacity; as Head of the Vatican State and also the primary leader of the Roman Catholic Church. It was a widely anticipated visit, many questions were asked – what will he tell President Bush about the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, about issues like immigration, health care and death penalty? What issues will he address at the United Nations? What will he do with the victims of the sexual abuse committed by the clergy? Some of these questions were answered when press releases were issued. But there were many private meetings and conversations whose content we can only guess. But I am more interested on how will he relate to people of other faiths, what is his message considering that he was once the Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, the enforcer of the Roman Catholic Doctrine during the reign of the late Pope John Paul II.

There are many doctrines and practices within the Roman Catholic Church that we find it hard to understand as Protestants – the idea of the infallibility of the Pope, the belief that the Pope is the Vicar of Christ, doctrine of the church and salvation, the teachings about Mary, among others. But whatever our differences as Protestant and Roman Catholics – to the world outside the Christian faith – they lump all of us as Christians without the fine distinctions. How each group within the Christian tradition behaves and relates to the world is seen as the representation of who we are as a whole.

Some would not distinguish between conservatives or liberals or whatever labels are used. Many thought that there is a monolithic set of belief and behavior among Christians. This is also true to most Christians as well, when some of us speak of those in the Muslim faith, most do not distinguish the variations within it. Some are even surprised that there are Sunni and Shia, all Muslims yet who holds different and conflicting views.

I reflected on this dynamics of faith as I reread our text today. What John exclusively recorded of Jesus saying; *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* This verse is dear to the hearts of many. The words *via, veritas, via* (the way, the truth, the life) were used as the motto of Silliman University, where many of us got our education.

This verse inspired many missionaries with good and sincere intentions to venture into the world spread the gospel at all cost. But others also use this verse to justify suppression of other faiths and cultures that resulted in the pain and suffering and injustice to those who cannot embrace Christianity.

Recently, I saw a You Tube posting using this text to attack Oprah Winfrey. It accused her TV show as a new age religion with Oprah as the priestess with millions of members worldwide who religiously watch it. It shows clips of conversations where Oprah was challenged on her position about Jesus. It sharply critiques New Age teaching of searching and finding God according to your personal and individual way or style. Our

text is today featured prominently – no other way but Jesus!

I fully affirm that from a Biblical perspective – there is no such idea as individually finding our way to God according to our choice or preferences. We speak of God's revelation in history in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What I disagree in that posting is the political twist after the theological presentation. It links her with Barack Obama, suggesting in a subtle way to all who are "true to the faith," to those who are "truly Christians" not to vote for him.

While I believe that the church should not endorse any candidate or any party nor dictate whom to vote among the candidates, I also do not agree that the church uses theology or religion as the only benchmark in politics, more so use it to discredit a person. Just as many of us are uncomfortable with countries labeled as Islamic states that are strictly ruled and intolerant to other faith, it is also true with nations who claimed to be ruled by "true and pure" Christians. We had our own taste of "Christian governance" for nearly 400 years when Spain imposed its rule over the Philippines, in fact we are labeled as the only Christian nation in Asia. I don't believe it was a good model or a showcase of Christianity.

So what will we make of this verse? Shall we start confronting others that what they believe is wrong?

John 14 is one of the favorite readings during funerals. In fact, if you look at the context of the verse it was said as a departure message of Jesus before his crucifixion. It was said, first and foremost, as a word of comfort, a word of assurance for those whom Christ will soon leave. It was spoken to give them the confidence that they needed when confronted with the reality of painful death and humiliating crucifixion.

When you read the story without the interruption of chapters and verses, you will have a different sense of what it means. Start reading on chapter 13:33, where Jesus speaks of the new commandment to love one another. In that section it was Peter who asked first the question, where are you going? *Jesus answered, "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward." Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.*

The way that Jesus was referring to was the way of the cross, and the life has to do with loving each other and the truth that death is not the end of life. All of these are embodied in Jesus' life, death and resurrection – he who walks in the way of the cross, he who loves unconditionally, and he who died and lives again.

We proclaim – this is God in action, God inviting us to walk the way of the cross, to live a life of love and to affirm the truth in life everlasting. We do not need any other guide or any other supplements to know God for Jesus showed us all. What else is lacking?

So what does it mean when we use this text as the basis of mission and evangelism? I would emphasize that behind the call and the slogan to accept Jesus Christ, as Lord and Savior, the church should make it clear that the invitation means to walk the way of the cross, to live a life of love and to embrace the truth of the resurrection. The way to God or the way to heaven is not about fulfilling our own personal and individual dreams but to live a Christ-like life – this is the way, the truth and the life.

George Lindbeck noted that pagan converts in the first centuries of the church did not

first understand the faith and then decide to become Christian converts; rather, they first decided and then came to understand. He said; “they were first attracted by the Christian community and form of life. In contrast, today, the churches primarily accommodate to the prevailing culture rather than shape it.” (Marva Dawn, True worship, Real Evangelism, Christian Century, April 21-28, 1999, 458.)

There is a need to tell people about Jesus. But shall we be confrontational? Jerry, one of Elsa and Rudy storekeepers is always proud to introduce me to costumers as a pastor. And he always adds, “Why don’t you go to his church?” People responded in many ways but I noticed that some people reacted negatively about the church. Some manage to talk briefly about a bad experience and walk out.

Eventually when one becomes a Christian, the church will be part of his or her life but given our context, perhaps the starting point of the conversation should not be the church but Jesus. John Stott said that “while it’s true that many people do not like the institutional church, only a few do not find Jesus both appealing and intriguing.”

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Can be both appealing and intriguing and can be a good starting point of conversation. As we hope and pray that others will see Jesus from a new and fresh perspective and embrace him as Lord and Savior. I wonder when was the last time that we mentioned Jesus in our conversation with a friend. If ever we did, was it to confront or to comfort someone?

In our desire to share the faith, I pray that we will not just quote and bombard people with verses such as John 14:6 and point to them that they are wrong. I like what James Kennedy wrote about discipling in the textbook for Evangelism Explosion. He said:

“To disciple another properly requires a vision of what the grace of God can do for a person. Those who are satisfied with merely proclaiming the gospel and receiving professions are like immoral seducers. The seducer is satisfied merely to exploit and then tell of his exploits rather than entering into a meaningful marriage commitment”

Discipleship is sharing the love of Jesus with those around us, whether it be through a formal discipling relationship in which we have a set agenda of material to cover each week or discipling through just the time we spend together. It is loving, caring people - not materials and programs - that make disciples. (Louise Brassard, “Immoral Seducers,” New Christian Life Ministries Web site, Newchristian.gospelcom.net.)

It is not the text – but the loving and caring people that speak and live out day by day what the text means – they who walk the way of the cross, they who live a life of Christ-like love, and they who embrace the truth of the resurrection – they are the one who attracts and leads people to Jesus.

May each of us be counted as one of those who deeply love and truly care for others, they who need to know and encounter our risen Lord! Amen.

April 20, 2008

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**5th Sunday of Easter**  
(Contemporary Worship Format)  
April 20, 2008 – 1:30 P.M.

Preacher: Rev. Reuben D. Cedino

Sermon:  
"Comforting or Confronting: A Challenging Choice"

SCRIPTURE READING:

*Epistle:* 1 Peter 2: 2-10

*Gospel:* John 14:1-14

Anthem: "Reflections of Peace"

*Fil-Am UCC Choir*

Liturgist: Ms. Faye M. Garcia

Pianist: Mr. Noel Rivera III

Organist and Choral Director: Ms. Rachel A. Dadap

Music Team: Noel Rivera III, Claude Pal,  
Alfa Garcia, Faye Garcia, Jansen Tubo

Mr. Joel Pal, *Elder-in-Charge*

Ms. Caring Rivera, *Steward-in-Charge*

Mr. Sonny Manalo, *Trustee-in-Charge*

Ms. Pinky Sevileno & Ms. Laura M. Lambert, *Ushers*

Ms. Laura Lambert, Ms. Pinky Sevileno & Ms. Leofe R. Sitoy, *Floral Offering*