



Reflection on the Scriptures of the Day
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Fifth Sunday of Easter

There was once a famous philosopher, who employed a driver, to take him from place to place. His driver held his employer, the philosopher, in very high regard. He listened in awe as his boss lectured and answered difficult questions about the nature of things and indeed about the meaning of life.

Then, one day, the driver approached the philosopher and said it was dream of his to switch roles for just one evening. The philosopher agreed, and, that evening the philosopher drove his driver to a lecture. The driver playing the role of philosopher handled himself remarkably well, reading from the philosopher's lecture notes.

However, at the end of the lecture, when the time came for questions, someone at the back of the room asked him the following question, "As a great philosophical mind, can you tell me: Is the epistemological meta-narrative that you seem to espouse compatible with a teleological account of the universe and the meaning of life?" The fake philosopher froze, and then after a few moments replied this way; he said, "Actually that is an extremely simple question! So very simple, in fact, that even my driver could answer it."

From ancient times, philosophers have tried to tend to issues that regard the meaning of life. They have generally summed up the human condition as a quest to answer three fundamental questions:

What should I do?

What can I know?

What can I hope for?

In response to the common-sense comment of doubting Thomas, Jesus Christ gives us the definitive answer to each one of these questions when he tells us that he is the way, the truth, and the life. To be more accurate, Jesus doesn't just give the answers; he is the answer.

Thus, when Christ says, "I am the way" that can be understood as Him saying: "What should you do? Follow me! Do what I have done."

Thus, when Christ says, "I am the truth" that can be understood as Him saying: "What can you know? You can know everything, if only you know me. And in knowing me, you can come to know the secret behind your heart's deepest yearnings. I am the truth, that is I am the very Wisdom of God."

Thus, when Christ says, "I am the life" that can be understood as Him saying: "What can you hope for? In me, and through me, you can hope for the fullness of life that you desire in your very soul, you can share the hope of rest in my Father's house in heaven."

Christ is truly the light that scatters every type of darkness. In fact, it can well be said that the quest of man to satisfy his heart's ultimate desire, is the quest to seek His face. Or more poetically put by St Augustine, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in God." And Jesus Christ is God.

One way of understanding this is to look at the life of the St. Anastasius the Persian. St. Anastasius the Persian was a soldier in the Persian army in the seventh century. After conquering Jerusalem, his army brought the relic of the True Cross back to their king, not as holy object but as proof of conquest, and winning their battle. As it happened, while traveling with the relic of the True Cross, St. Anastasius started asking questions about Christianity. And he continued in his life, in the months and years that followed, to ask those questions more and more, until one day Anastasius became a Christian himself. And he was baptized!

Needless to say, that conversion did not go over well with his king or his people. Ultimately, Anastasius was imprisoned as a Christian spy, and began a long period of incarceration, interrogation, and torture that tried in vain to re-convert this young soldier back to his native Persian beliefs.

To make him recant his new faith Anastasius was at first chained to another criminal. Later to torment him more, his captor's chained Anastasius neck to his ankle and, while still chained, he was forced to drag or carry heavy loads of rock each day. Each night, he was thrown back in a dungeon. As his resistance strengthened, his torturers got frustrated, and so Anastasius was laid on the ground and beaten with clubs. Later, his legs were crushed with a heavy beam pressed upon them. Once, tradition tells us, Anastasius was beaten with rods for three days, yet stood firm in faith.

I should note that throughout this torturous process, every few days, Anastasius was offered position, honor, and wealth in the Persian court if he would only deny his faith in Christ and would give up his new found faith of Christianity. But some like contestants on the game show, "Deal or No Deal," St. Anastasius basically said, "No deal."

Once he was even offered a special deal in which he would be allowed to continue living as a Christian if he simply denied Christ by word in a private conversation with the king. Anastasius answered: "No deal."

Finally, when all efforts failed to separate Anastasius from Christ, he and 70 other Christians were ordered by the king to be condemned to death by strangulation. And so, it came to pass. But, throughout all of this, Anastasius was seemingly at peace, right up and through the moment of his death; he breathed his last breath on this earth as follower of Christ.

I tell you this story of Anastasius, because he was a man who had come to know the meaning of life. He discovered the true, unique value of friendship with Jesus Christ, as the way, the truth, and the life - and the only one who can satisfy our hearts deepest longings and keep our hearts from being troubled. Trusting in Christ, Anastasius needed nothing more. There was no deal that could be offered to change his mind or his heart; because salvation for him was the best deal of all. The Good News of Christ was the only news he needed.

And so, it should be for us that because Christ has given us himself, his friendship, and his own life, he can also uniquely give us true peace of heart. Thus, at the Last Supper he commanded his Apostles, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," as we heard in today's Gospel. And now on this day, in this way, he is saying the same thing to us. And you know what? He can say it - and from Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior it is not

empty advice, or mere kind words, or wishful thinking. Rather, it just about takes on the flavor of a command: DO NOT let your hearts be troubled!

Jesus has suffered for us, died for us and paid the price of our sins. He has gone to prepare us a place in his Father's house, a place that no one can take away or destroy, but us. And so, if we stay close to him, what do we have to fear? Nothing! What can trouble us? Nothing!

St Paul wrote:

"If God be with us, who can be against us? Since God did not spare his own Son... we may be certain, after such a gift, that he will not refuse anything he can give..." (Romans 8:31-33).

It is hard for us to accept this wonderful truth. But true it is. The whole universe is ours, because Christ is ours. In the midst of troubles, temptations, sicknesses, failures, and even our sins, Christ is always by our side, loving, guiding, and upholding us. And so, as in faith, we accept this truth, we begin to experience true peace of heart — the kind of peace of heart that St. Anastasius had even in the worst of time. So, as Christ tells us, as St. Anastasius witnesses to us, and as faith commends: "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

And today, Jesus will renew his commitment to us in this Mass, on this altar, in your hearts, and in your minds. And when he does, let's ask him to increase our faith in his goodness. And that will allow us, as a famous song says, "to love Thee more clearly, love Thee more dearly and follow Thee more nearly," and to above all, as commended by Christ today, to learn to obey his command: "Do not, do not, do not let your hearts be troubled." God is with us!