

## Homily for the Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year A

May 3, 2026

St. Bavo Parish

Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

*First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 6:1-7 (Selection of the first deacons.)*

*Responsory: Psalm 33 (Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.)*

*Second Reading: 1 Peter 2:4-9 (You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood.)*

*Gospel: John 14:1-12 (I am going to prepare a place for you in my Father's house.)*

Today's gospel comes from Jesus' "Last Supper Discourse" in the Gospel of John. Jesus, knowing that his time on earth is very short, tries to prepare his disciples for what is coming — not just his imminent passion and death, but also the challenges that they will face later, after his resurrection and ascension. In effect, Jesus is laying the groundwork for the post-resurrection Church.

By this time, Jesus clearly understands that the Father sent him into the world to offer up his life for sinners. He also understands that when he is raised up again and returns to the Father, he will open the way for all of his present and future disciples to *follow him* into that eternal glory. Hence, he tells his disciples that he has prepared a place for each of them in "his Father's house," and he further explains to Thomas that *he himself* is the way that will bring them to that special place that he has prepared for them. In other words, they don't need to find their own way to salvation; they only need to *follow Jesus* and allow him to lead them to their eternal home.

That's a very comforting thought for all of us, especially as we mourn the death of a loved one or contemplate our own mortality. The first half of today's gospel reading is the most commonly used Scripture passage at funerals, because it speaks the truth that all of us need to hear as we say good-bye to people who were close to us. We want to know that Jesus is personally taking care of them, making sure that they're at peace with God for all eternity. And that is exactly what Jesus promises. He assures us: "I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be." If that's true, if Jesus really is "the way, the truth and the life," then we have no cause for concern. We can confidently entrust our deceased loved ones to him, and when our time comes, we can just as confidently hand over our own lives to him.

The disciples struggle to grasp what Jesus is saying to them about eternal life, but they become even more confused when he claims that they "have seen the Father." None of them have seen God, although they certainly would like to, if that were possible. The disciples had come to believe that Jesus possessed a uniquely intimate relationship with God, one so intimate that he could call God his "Father." Perhaps Jesus was suggesting that he could reveal the Father to them, as no one else could. So, Philip eagerly requests, "Master, *show us the Father*, and that will be enough for us." Jesus' shocking response is, "Whoever has seen me *has seen the Father*." Remember, these disciples had no concept of Incarnation yet. They believed that Jesus was *sent* by God and *anointed* by God, but they could not fathom the idea that Jesus *is* God in human flesh. Yet, that is precisely what Jesus is telling them: "I am in the Father and *the*

*Father is in me.*” As impossible as it seems, Jesus is claiming to be *God in human form* — “true God and true man,” as we profess in our Creed.

This all makes perfect sense to us today, in light of our understanding about the triune nature of God. But prior to Jesus’ death and resurrection, this kind of talk would have left the disciples baffled. So, Jesus tries to make it more concrete for them, by emphasizing the *words* that they have heard him speak and the *works* that they have seen him do. Jesus tells them that the Father is the unseen source behind all of this revelation. “The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own.” It is *the Father* who speaks through Jesus. And, “The Father who dwells in me is doing *his works*.” So, what looks like Jesus acting on his own is really *the Father* acting through him to accomplish *his divine will*. Again, we understand this today, because it has been revealed to us that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit share a single divine will. They all act *together* to accomplish the mighty works of God. Ironically, this concept is easier for us to grasp today because all three Persons of the Holy Trinity remain *hidden* from our sight. The Apostles were at something of a *disadvantage*, because they could see Jesus, but they could *not* see the Father, and the very existence of the Holy Spirit had not yet been revealed to them. That would come a few verses later in this same discourse.

At the very end of this gospel passage, Jesus makes an even more extraordinary claim: “Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father.” Seriously? *We* will do works greater than those that Jesus himself did? How could that be?

Well, let us look to the Acts of the Apostles and the experience of the Early Church. Today we heard about the selection of the first *deacons*. They were chosen not because of their holiness alone. In addition to being “reputable men,” they were also found to be “*filled with the Spirit and wisdom*.” In other words, the members of the Christian community could see the Holy Spirit working through them to accomplish God’s will. Isn’t that exactly what Jesus promised to his disciples? He said that we who believe, who are filled with the Spirit that was gifted to us at our baptism, will be able to do great things *because God acts through us*. We can see in the Acts of the Apostles how God accomplished remarkable things through the members of the Early Church — not only the ordained ministers, but *all the people* of the Church. The faith spread like wildfire, despite the concerted efforts to stamp it out in its infancy.

In his first letter to the universal Church, Saint Peter encourages the faithful to join their efforts to those of Christ: “Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood and to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Christ is the cornerstone of the structure, but all of us are built into that great edifice of spirit which is the Church. Let each one of us play the part that has been given to us, so that *through us*, the mighty works of God may continue to be accomplished in our world today.