

## **Feast of St. Philip and St. James 2022**

“Jesus saith unto him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.’” (St. John 14)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

In this morning’s Gospel, the Lord Jesus makes a very exclusive statement. By ‘exclusive’ I mean that there are no other options – there is only Him. All others are excluded as possibilities. When Thomas asked Him, “How can we know the way?” Jesus replied, “I am the way, the truth and the life: no one comes to the Father but by Me”.

For many this is an eye-brow raiser: how can there be only one way and one truth? What about the claims of Judaism, Buddhism, Shinto, Islam, Sikhism, Confucianism, Jainism, Hinduism, Taoism, Baha’i, and Zoroastrianism? What about the Mormons and the Jehovah’s Witnesses? What about the pagan religions that are popping up: Wicca and the old Norse or Viking religions like Aastro and Forn Sidr? And what about native spirituality; the humanists and all the philosophies that inform humanistic thought? How could JESUS say, “I am the way the truth and the life: no one comes to the Father but by Me”?

This question is big, but it is not at all new. During his first trip to Greece, St. Paul visited the Areopagus – a governing council of the city’s elders. He began his address to them with a complement: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To an unknown god’”.

The thing is, the Greek culture oozed with philosophy. It was what they had for breakfast, lunch and supper: talking, debating, rhetorical questioning – philosophical conversation was in the marketplace and in every home. The Greek culture was one that valued knowledge and truth. Enter St. Paul, and using the altar to an unknown god as a starting point, he said, “What you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.” Then he went on: “The God Who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by hands.”

Instead of living in a shrine or an altar, Paul told the Athenians how the Lord of heaven and earth came to live among us, as a man, in the Person of Jesus Christ. Paul demonstrated great faith and courage on that unforgettable afternoon. But, the results were mixed: a few believed and joined him; others made fun of him; and some expressed interest on an intellectual/philosophical level.

## **Feast of St. Philip and St. James 2022**

The point in relating this story is simply to say that our modern-day, pluralistic Canadian society is nothing new. Granted, it is new to many of us, having grown up in an age when Canada was outwardly Christian. We remember when the Bible was read in the classroom, and every school day started off with the Lord's Prayer. We remember when school Christmas programs were based on the Birth of Christ, and when every store except some gas stations and pharmacies were closed on Good Friday. We remember when there was no such thing as Sunday shopping.

All of that has changed and we are living in a pluralistic society – a society which embraces a diversity of views, rather than a single approach to God. And it is in the midst of that wide-ranging diversity that we read JESUS' words in today's Gospel: "I am the way, the truth and the life: no one comes to the Father but by Me."

There is lots to consider with regards to this statement, but, in the end, the reason JESUS spoke these words is simple. He claimed to be the world's only Saviour in order to give us HOPE.

HOPE, afterall, is what we really need! In a world where wars, and famines, floods and earthquakes, wild fires and mudslides, terrorism and domestic violence, climate change and inflation, pornography and drug addiction, affordable housing and human trafficking continue to be daily news and the source of unimaginable suffering, we need real HOPE. So the question is: what HOPE can JESUS bring to those who suffer; to those who are dying; and to those who have done wrong and need a second chance?

JESUS can offer real HOPE for two reasons: first because of His Incarnation. We struggle with the word 'incarnation'. It is not a word that we use, except in Church. Let's break it down: in-car-nation. 'Car' means 'flesh' as in 'carnivorous'; and the Latin word 'nate' or 'nation' means 'born' or 'birth'. So, 'in-car-nate' means 'born in the flesh'. This is an amazing Mystery – that the Almighty God stooped down from the glory of Heaven and entered the misery of this world, being born in human flesh of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is an unprecedented, unheard of, exclusive action of Divine Mercy: that God became human; the Creator became one with the creature. Neither the Buddha, or Allah, or Thor or Joseph Smith can make such a claim. It is a holy Mystery exclusive to Christianity because of the Mercy of the Triune God.

The reason for the Incarnation of Christ is the next thing. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in Him

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should not perish, but have eternal life.” God became incarnate -- JESUS was born in Bethlehem -- in order to take our sins upon Himself at Calvary. The manger and the Cross are two scenes in the same Act. Christ, the Son of God took all of our sins upon Himself as our Sin-Bearer and Substitute. He suffered and died, and went down to the place of the dead. In other words, He confronted the enemy that hangs over us all. Then, on the third day after dying, JESUS rose up from the grave, alive. He defeated the power of death by His Resurrection.

In Him and with Him and through Him, therefore, we have HOPE: a sure and certain hope. We have God’s promise that, in Christ, our sins are forgiven and our relationship with God is healed. In Baptism, He graciously and freely applies the benefits of JESUS’s victory to our account. And, He makes inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. That is, God gives us a sure and certain HOPE of everlasting Life. So, as the One Who became Incarnate, in order to die and rise from the dead for us, JESUS is truly our only Saviour. Therefore, He said, “I am the way, the truth and the life: no one comes to the Father but by Me.”

As you reflect on this, it may be helpful to ask this skeptical question: ‘Yes, but what did JESUS get out of this – out of His mission to Planet earth?’ We are conditioned to expect a hidden twist. What was JESUS’ ‘take’? Well, let’s see: He was mocked and tortured, Humiliated and brutally killed. His only ‘take’ is the completion of His Father’s will and our salvation. He undertook His mission and offered Himself sacrificially as a purely selfless action. As St. Paul said, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” (1 Timothy 1.15)

The difficult thing about JESUS’ claim to be the way, the truth and the life is within us. I mean, in order to accept His word, I have to admit that I need Him. I must acknowledge that I am not perfect. I have to confess that I am a sinner who falls far short of what God intended. And yet, when I do admit that, the Lord does not reject me; He runs to meet me. He reaches out to me with His love and mercy. He forgives me and offers to renew my heart and mind by His Spirit.

So the biggest obstacle to accepting Christ’s claim as the only Saviour is my pride. The Cross stands before me as both a reminder of the cost of my redemption, and the greatness of God’s Love. There my Lord’s precious Blood was shed to save me from my sins.

In today’s Epistle, St. James says that if someone lacks wisdom, they should ask God. They should ask in faith and not waver. Then he says, “A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways”. The thing is, in order to live with confidence and

## **Feast of St. Philip and St. James 2022**

real HOPE, we have to stop thinking that JESUS is one option among many. He calls us to love Him and to follow Him with our whole heart and with all of our soul, mind and strength. We can be respectful and charitable towards other people whose views differ from ours; but we must be single-minded in our own commitment to Christ.

Last week's Epistle said, "He who has the Son has life; and he who has not the Son of God has not life." Let us be honest with ourselves: who else but God the Holy Trinity, through the Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, can offer and deliver the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life?

And now unto God Almighty: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost...