

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me...”

One of the most prominent landmarks of Evanston, Illinois, near Chicago, is without a doubt the Bahai Temple. This is a magnificent construction that has been commended for its architectural beauty. What makes this building so unique is that its design incorporates key elements of the Bahai faith, which was founded by Bahá'u'lláh a hundred and fifty years ago.

For instance, in this spiritual tradition the number “9” signifies completion, perfection, harmony. Because of this, the Evanston temple has nine sides representing the nine great religions of the world: Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, the religion of the Sabaeans in Yemen, the Babi religion and the Bahai religion. Each side has a door and a set of windows, meaning that we can enter the same building through any door, and we can find and reach the same god through any of the nine religions.

In a similar way there is only one sun and its light shines through all the windows. There is only one god and his truth is communicated through all religions.

According to the Bahais, all religions are essentially the same. In fact, the great spiritual figures in history: Krishna, Zoroaster, Buddha, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Bab and Bahá'u'lláh are all divine messengers, prophets, who came at different times, in different places, to educate mankind on the truth of the same god.

Of course, as Christians we respect all religions and spiritual traditions. It would be a contradiction to demean or hate other faith-communities on account of our love for Jesus. And yet, at the same time, we cannot water down our convictions. We have to present and articulate our own faith without any ambiguity.

In this sense, today’s gospel passage provides us with the opportunity to clarify how we view and deal with the issue of religious diversity. Christianity believes that there is indeed “one god and father of all.” (Eph 4:6) but, obviously, human beings have advanced different concepts of god, resulting in several religious systems.

Of course, there are striking similarities among all religions but the differences are very real and drastic as well. Therefore, all religions are not essentially the same. Christians are often accused of being arrogant, intolerant and exclusive because we recognize that there are elements of goodness, beauty and truth in every

religion. But we also maintain that only Jesus, His revelation and teachings contain the fullness of the goodness, the beauty and the truth of god.

Why? Because Jesus is not just a prophet, a religious reformer: he is God in human form, “whoever has seen me has seen the father...I am in the father and the father is in me.” (Jn 14:9) This is a conviction we cannot hide or conceal: that Jesus is the way. He is not ‘one more way,’ ‘one way among others’ but the way. Only through Jesus can we reach with certainty the true god, “no one comes to the father except through me.”

Jesus is also the truth. His mission was not to preach new religious ideas but to tell us the whole truth about god. “For this is eternal life: that they should know you, the only true god, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ.” (Jn 17:3) He came to disclose the mystery, the heart, the mind, the real being of god. Ignorance of Jesus is ignorance of god. Knowledge of Jesus is knowledge of the truth of god, “if you know me, then you will also know my father.” Jesus is the life. No one else in human history has ever claimed that he has the will and the power to keep us alive, to raise us from death, to give us life everlasting. “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, though he should die, will come to life...” (Jn 11:25) so, Jesus is our religion!

All of you may remember that old and famous story of a man who was having doubts about the identity of Jesus. One night he had a dream and saw himself walking confused and disoriented until he fell into a bed of quicksand. All of a sudden, Confucius appeared to him and said, “it was your lack of wisdom which took you to a place such as this.” And the man continued to sink. Next buddha observed the situation and said, “let your plight be a lesson to the rest of humanity.” Then Mohammed came by and said, “suffer now and you will enjoy the seven heavens.” Finally, Jesus appeared and said to the sinking man, “take my hand and I will save you.”

This is not Christian propaganda. This story presents in a simple way what our faith proclaims: that Jesus is actually true god and true man, lord and savior. This is the Jesus that you are going to receive, dear children: the son of god, the son of Mary, the way, the truth and the life. Through his power, he will change bread and wine into his own body and blood. He will become food for you, food for everlasting life. And I ask you to cultivate your friendship with him, to study the bible so that you can learn more about him, to speak with him every day in prayer, to show your love for him by serving your family and community.

Jesus will help you live without fear and always do what is right. He will lead us to heaven where he has prepared a dwelling place for all of us.

Today, we also pray for all mothers; we remember all of them with gratitude; they were the ones who first introduced us to Jesus, the ones who through their love and sacrifice gave us a taste of the love and mercy of god. The highest law for a Christian is the law of love.

As our communities become more diverse, we are called to respect, be a good neighbor and work with everyone regardless of our religious differences. And the catholic church teaches that because Jesus died and rose for all, even if they do not know it, "the members of other religions are not excluded from heaven and eternal salvation" as long as they proceed with righteousness and justice. We can never amalgamate all faiths into one religion. Only god can make us one. But through dialogue, cooperation and respect we may find and see the way...

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