

John 10 1-10 | AM

Today's reading is one of the great I am.

The phrase 'I am' originates from the 1st testament. When God speaks to Jacob in Genesis 28:13 he states 'I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac'. In Exodus 3:14 we hear the phrase 'I am who I am.' In Isaiah 45:6 we get 'I am the Lord there is no other,' and Isaiah 43:11, I am the Lord and besides me there is no Saviour.'

When Jesus uses 'I am' it would then seem he is putting himself on equal footing with God. The hearers obviously took it this way as they were close to throwing stones at him when he used the term later in chapter 8 but in reality it is more that Jesus is God's Son, one who can speak of God, one who has intimacy with God and one who is uniquely commissioned to deliver a message from the One who sent him.

And so in John's Gospel we get a new set of I am's, each one expressing a particular relationship Jesus had with the people at the time. I would like to look at three, I am the bread of life, I am the light to the world and I am the gate keeper.

The first I am used is after the feeding of the 5000 when the crowds wanted to take him and make him their King. Because of this, Jesus crossed the lake to get away from their demands. But the next day when they figured out where he was, and followed. It was at that point that Jesus told a record-breaking crowd: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

They grumbled and whined, and ultimately left in droves because they realised that Jesus was not going to be the provider of real food but was talking of something much different, something spiritual.

Many of the people who followed Jesus at this point were hoping for a political saviour. They wanted political and practical solutions to their fate. These people had watched Rome have limited success instituting a sort of welfare program that they called Bread for Peace where free grain was given to every citizen, but it was failing as people's reliance and demands grew.

Jesus recognised the problem and tells the crowd "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. They wanted more.

Missionaries in some countries often talk about "Rice Christians." These are people who will quickly convert to Christianity in exchange for food or some other physical benefit. The problem with Rice Christians is that when the goods have gone, so are they. I don't like this term, it is a bit derogatory but the reality is these type of Christians are all over the world, people who look to God only for what they can get and turn their back on God the first time he fails to deliver.

Jesus told the crowd: Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.

I am light to the world, whoever follows me will have eternal life.

Jesus was brought an adulterer by the Pharisees. He is asked; what shall we do with this woman? The response as usual is out of the box, he who is without sin can cast the first stone, and no one does. They were following their rules without any thought for another human being, without thought for life.

Jesus recognised the issues surrounding the rules around adultery and was trying to get the people to see a new perspective, one that would get them back on track with God. By stating 'I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life' he was suggesting that by following him, and thus following God there could be a change in heart from the legalistic world the people lived in to one that sought forgiveness, reconciliation and compassion. Blindly following a set of rules that are not life giving or takes life away is like being in the dark, or not connected with God. This in Jesus mind is exactly what had happened with the Pharisees as they sought justice and death over forgiveness, compassion or love.

I am the gate keeper.

There is no Dana, only Zuul! It is hard not to think of the film Ghost Busters when I hear this one liner. Although Zuul was a demigod in the film the idea was based on a rather obscure deity called Gozer which was worshipped around 6000BC by the Mesopotamians. Gozer was recognised as having great power.

The problem with power is that it can be used as a tool to subdue or control others, a gate to keep people in or out.

Just before today's reading we get the Pharisees investigating Jesus for healing a blind man on the Sabbath. They question the young man. They reiterate that they are disciples of Moses and not Jesus. Their power base was threatened by the man's acknowledgement of Jesus as a leader and they did their best to pull him in to line which failed. Their power was such that they could effectively evict him from the temple, make him an outcast which other would accept. The gate closed on him, and thus he was unable to be connected with God as the temple was the only place that this could happen. Jesus in hearing of this states that he is the gate keeper, he is the pathway to God not the temple. By doing this he is reemphasizing his relationship with God, that he is the one who has the authority to deliver a message from God and that by following him, and having a right relationship with him is the only true way of being with God. No wonder the Pharisees were furious.

But to Jesus, the leading authorities had lost their way, they were in the dark and there need to be a new way of being with God, one that was not linked with material things or controlled by rules brought on by the powerful elite. It was, a life based on the spiritual not material, on forgiveness and compassion not rules and regulations and this way was only possible through him.

So Jesus the bread of life reminds us of the deep spiritual life we seek with God and not to get too caught up in the materialistic world.

Jesus the light reminds us that although we live in a world of rules and regulations, the dark, God's love for us all must over ride this, forgiveness and compassion is much more important.

And Jesus the gate keeper reminds us that he is the way to achieve a right relationship with God. By following him, his way of being with others, by showing love, and care for all, only then will we obtain a true and deep relationship with God.