

5th Sunday of Easter (A)
(1 Peter 2:4-9 / John 14:1-12)
03.05.2026
To belong

More than thirty years ago, St Teresa of Calcutta declared: “In the developed countries, there is a poverty of intimacy and of loneliness. There is no greater sickness in the world today than that one.” (*In My...*, p. 89) Today it is striking to note that in her synodal discernment process, the Catholic Church, throughout the world and in Ireland, identified the theme of belonging as one of her priorities and so recognised the poverty of intimacy and loneliness mentioned by Mother Teresa as a challenge for our Christians communities.

This is not really surprising if we remember that belonging is one of our fundamental emotional needs and human motivations. As some psychologists would write: “The desire for interpersonal attachment may well be one of the most far-reaching and integrative constructs currently available to understand human nature.” (p. 522)

This explains why, for all of us, a crisis of belonging is a crisis of identity. We are shaped by our relationships, and find support and encouragement in our sense of belonging. Belonging is really about longing to be.

Today, Jesus in our Gospel reading and St Peter in his letter help us to reflect on what it means for us to belong. First, Jesus promises us a home in God: “There are many rooms in my Father’s house.” This promise does not speak only of a reality to come after death, it begins here and now in Jesus who gives himself as the sure ground on which we can stand. With St Paul, we can say in faith that we belong to Christ (cf. 1 Co 3:21). Our first belonging, our deepest identity is in Christ, in his living and active presence within us. As he dwells in us, we belong when we dwell in him (cf. Jn 15:4), when we are in a stable and loving relationship with him.

A second facet to belonging is highlighted by St Peter in our first reading when he writes: “Set yourselves close to the Lord so that you (...) may be living stones making a spiritual house.”

To dwell in the Lord leads each one of us, together, to participate in the building of God’s house. Our belonging to the Lord entails our belonging to one another. Together we are the stones of a spiritual house whose Christ is the cornerstone.

Because we are human beings and not angels our deep-seated need for belonging is answered in togetherness, in connecting with one another in a real way.

We look for connections with our relatives and friends, in sport activities or in a political party, in a religious organisation or a knitting club and, truly, all these groups help us on the way. Yet as Christians, we believe that we reach another level of belonging in Christ as members of his body. In all the groups I just mentioned, the driving force is sameness: we gather together because we have the same opinion or passion, because we pursue the same goal. In the fellowship of the Church the driving force is love which reconciles diversity, which creates a dynamic of mutual enrichment through differences. In this context we experience true belonging and true life. As Pope Leo reminds us: “We are not united by bonds of sympathy, shared interests or mutual convenience, but by belonging to the people whom the Lord redeemed at the price of his Blood” (*Message*, 09.12.2025).

So we belong to Christ and we belong to one another. There is still a third aspect that is not present in our readings but which we find in the story of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32). Therein when the son has left his home, his place of belonging with his father, when he is lost,

without money and food, keeping pigs, St Luke tells us that “he came back to himself” (v. 17). The son was not at home in his own skin. He made the common mistake of thinking that it is possible to be at home with others, to experience happiness and belonging without being at home and at peace with oneself. In these kinds of situations, we are tempted to move endlessly from one community to another, from one sexual partner to another. When we run away from ourselves, from whom we truly are, abandoning our heart, the dwelling-place we carry within us, then we are unable to connect with others and with God, to feel at home with those around us and to experience the loving embrace of our heavenly Father.

Pope Francis once said: “If someone were to ask me: ‘What do you think is the way Christians deviate today and always? What do you think is the most dangerous deviation Christians can make?’, I would say without a doubt: the lack of memory of belonging to a people.” (*Meditation*, 04.05.2020)

Today the challenge for us is to rekindle the memory of belonging to God and to a people and for each one of us to return to our heart, our inner home where we belong and where the Father is waiting for us. This dynamic is by grace all-inclusive, all men and women are invited to belong, those sit 2 benches away from us in the church, those who are marginalised because of their mental or physical disabilities, those who are discriminated against because of their sexual orientation or the colour of their skin.

If we come back to the synodal journey in which we are engaged, it seems to me that we need our Church and our Christian communities to become more and more places of belonging and inclusion. But the Church will be an inclusive Church only if we, who are within, bear witness to the fact that our experience of belonging is truly life-giving. Allow me to suggest that the first step for us is to go beyond an individualistic attendance at the Eucharistic Celebration or as Pope Leo declared: we must “not (be) merely users of the sacred, of the sacraments, perhaps out of mere habit” but living members of the Body of Christ (*Piazza San Pietro Magazine*, January 2026).