



**Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue  
in the City of New York**

**The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, OBE, DD, *Rector***  
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**[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)**

**Sunday, April 28, 2002**  
*The Fifth Sunday of Easter*

*Festal Eucharist*  
*at 11am*

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector  
on  
Saint John 14:1-14  
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*RELIGION: VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL*

*Philip said to [Jesus], "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father."*

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

When Saint Thomas Church was celebrating its 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a parish in 1998, Bishop Grein spoke at our banquet about what he appreciated in Saint Thomas's mission in midtown New York. He said, "It has something to do with vertical religion. And by that I mean those expressions and acts of our religion that draw us upward. Jacob's experience at Bethel would be a good example of vertical religion, that ladder connecting heaven and earth, angels ascending and descending. There he encounters God." (*Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue*, p. 293) You can read the Bishop's entire address in the appendix of our new parish history book.

The magnificent gothic architecture with its reredos, pierced by the three blue windows which always suggest to me the sapphire vault of heaven; the ceremonial of the liturgy, and of course, the sublime music; all this, combined with a tradition of orthodox teaching and preaching, forms the foundation of our mission of vertical religion, which is not an end in itself but a means to an end. As the Bishop said, up there we encounter God.

Religion is also horizontal. It is not only transcendent; it is incarnate. Cast a sideways glance at your neighbor in the pew. There is your brother or sister in the Body of Christ. Vertical as we are and ever shall be, we also have many horizontal functions. There are the organizations that assist our worship – the altar guild, the acolytes, the ushers and greeters. Within the professional clergy and lay staff of the Church, the Choir and Choir School, the spirit experienced within those groups and communities is a manifestation of horizontal religion. So is the collaboration and leadership of the Rector, Wardens and Vestry. Then there are the Saturday Soup Kitchen volunteers, the groups who attend classes here on Sunday morning, Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday nights, the fellowship groups – all these constitute horizontal religion incarnate at Saint Thomas, because they involve the relationships between and among the members of Christ's Body here. Again, these activities are not ends in themselves. If in vertical religion "up there" we encounter God, we also encounter him in the love and service of our fellow Christians. As Saint John writes, "He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen." (I Jn 4:20)

Our engagement of both vertical and horizontal religion, of the transcendence and imminence of God in Jesus Christ, *continues outside, seven whole days*, not one hour of one day in seven, in what Father Stafford likes to call the people, places, things and events of daily existence. Our mission here is to strengthen our members for that engagement. It is not easy out there in daily life.

Shortly before he was crucified, our Lord comforted his first disciples by telling them not to be afraid. "Believe in God; believe also in me." In his Father's house, he said, are many rooms (or, better, mansions!) and he was going to the Father to prepare a place there for us. After our patron Saint Thomas, characteristically, asked directions on how to get there, Jesus told him that *he himself* was the way, the truth and the life. In other words, it was a spiritual journey, and no one gets there except by him.

Saint Philip didn't see why Jesus didn't just show them the Father then and there, and "we shall be satisfied." All this time you have been with me, replied Jesus, and yet you still don't know me, Philip? If you have seen me you have seen the Father; he is in me and I am in him. Many people saw Jesus. But the eye of faith is what is needed to perceive him, to see his divine nature and sonship.

This issue has never left the Church. It is present here at Saint Thomas Church, whether you are talking about vertical or horizontal religion. You can see and hear and even smell the outward signs of vertical religion. You can attend and work and go through the motions of horizontal religion. The question is, Are we tasting and seeing how gracious the Lord is? Do we possess the form yet lack the substance? Do we only touch with our lips and press with our teeth the Sacrament, without feeding on the Body and Blood of our Savior in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving? "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me?"

The Christian faith is direct and personal. Next week, Bishop Sisk, who was installed as Bishop Grein's successor last September, will visit us to preach, preside and administer Confirmation and Reception to new members. He will ask them to reaffirm their renunciation of evil and to renew their commitment to Jesus Christ. Then he will ask us to support them in this. Finally, he will lead us in the reciting of the Baptismal Covenant, with questions beginning, Do you believe, Will you continue, Will you persevere, Will you proclaim, Will seek and serve, Will you strive? Then he will lay his hands on each new member, as has been done to most of us, and call down the Holy Spirit to strengthen and defend, to confirm and receive them as faithful members of the Church. Yes, the faith, both vertical and horizontal is direct and personal.

My prayer, and I am depending on you all to join me in this desire, is that Jesus Christ will be known, worshiped and obeyed in every aspect of Saint Thomas Church and Choir School's life, our vertical and horizontal dimensions. Out on Fifth Avenue, we have a sign that welcomes people to worship, love and serve our Lord Jesus Christ. Our verbal welcomes are in that same holy name of Jesus Christ. Let that welcome reflect what is going on inside, everywhere. Let this be one of the mansions of the Father's house. Let this be a refuge on the Christian pilgrim's way home to the Father. Let this be a lively, interesting, safe, gentle, merciful, pure, loving, true, joyful and even fun place to learn and live Jesus Christ. Then, like Philip, we shall truly be satisfied.

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