

The Danger of Stepping Forward

Ascension of the Lord (Year C)

June 2, 2019

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I can remember the first time I rode my bike without training wheels. Growing up in a neighborhood full of kids, there was always a lot of hype around milestones like these. No training wheels meant one was an older kid and could get around the neighborhood much faster. My initial reaction was, 'this is easy.' I found that gravity balanced me the faster I peddled. Feeling the breeze in my face and the thrill of accomplishing something new was liberating. While I admit that coming to a stop was a disaster as I tipped over into the grass for a softer landing, this was the start of a great summer.

Today, we celebrate the Ascension of our Lord back into heaven 40 days after his resurrection from the dead. According to the Acts of the Apostles, "as the disciples were looking on, Jesus was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight." Or, as *Luke's* Gospel tells us, "then he led them out as far as Bethany, raised his hands, and blessed them. As he blessed them he parted from them and was taken up to heaven." In both accounts, the emphasis is on Jesus leaving his disciples so they could no longer see him physically. In many ways, this was like Jesus taking off his disciples' training wheels. He taught them what they needed to know, but now it was time for them to ride on their own two wheels.

In anything we do, going out on our own can feel dangerous. What will await us? Can we do it? What if we fail? It is no different in the spiritual life. Sometimes, we feel abandoned by God as God takes away the crutches we've relied upon in life for too long. Today, God takes Jesus away from us in a very real sense. God the Father does promise to send

the Holy Spirit, but before God can do that, we need to show God that we are capable of stepping forward in faith. We need to show God that we can take risks. The Holy Spirit cannot work with someone that seeks only their own safety and comfort.

Timothy Radcliffe, the former Master General of the entire Dominican Order, wrote, “sharing the life of the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ is indeed dangerous...but not so much because God will destroy us as because if we too love outrageously, then we may well get hurt.” (*Take the Plunge*, 213-4) Yes, there is a danger involved in moving ahead. Yes, we may get hurt. But those are the prerequisites for receiving the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus’ departure at the Ascension invites us to accept the dangers of stepping forward.

Question: Am I able to step out in faith, even when it seems dangerous?

Going back to the story I began with, there was a gap between getting rid of my training wheels and riding (and stopping) proficiently. It was a transitional time. We are now in that transitional time on the liturgical calendar. Jesus has left us and ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven; the Holy Spirit has not yet come on Pentecost. It is now up to us to decide if we want to go back out of fear or to step forward with joy.