

**24 May 2020**

## **Ascension of the Lord**

*Acts 1:11; Ephesians 1:17-23; Matthew 28:16-20*

Anticipating this Feast of the Lord's Ascension into heaven, a friend sent me a cartoon of sorts that said, **"Today is the Feast of the Ascension. For those who don't know what it's about, it's the day that Jesus started working from home."** A rather timely, joke, yes? Plus, the truth in it is that It's not that Jesus is gone; **it's not "see ya later, been nice knowin' ya."** As the preface prayer to our Eucharistic Prayer says so well, **he leaves "not to distance himself from us, but that give us confidence that where he has gone we will follow."** And he'll send his Holy Spirit to help us join him.

Throughout John's Gospel account, chapter 16-17, **Jesus says to them that it is better for them if he leaves them because he'll send the Holy Spirit to be with them.** This might be a case, though, where our intellectual explanation of why the Ascension is a good thing doesn't add up to our own preference. **I tend to agree with a statement I read last week, that, given a choice, we would all prefer just five minutes with Jesus to a whole lifetime with the Holy Spirit.** Imagining Jesus ascending out of the Apostles sight tends to fill us not with joy but grief in empathy for the Apostles. Will it really be better that he is out of our sight??

**Here's why it's better:** Because, with the help of his Holy Spirit, **his physical absence allows us to move from knowing Jesus to being Jesus.** I realize that's a bold statement. **But what if Jesus' goal all along was not to take care of us but to change us, to transform us so that we could be his presence on earth?**

I think there's **a lot in the Bible to support that,** and a lot in our Church tradition. In the Acts of the Apostles there is one story after the next of the Apostles doing the very same things Jesus did, teaching, healing, forming community. Our church teachings that the **main point of the sacraments is to form us more into the image of Jesus.** In **Baptism** we die to an old self and rise anew to live for God; In **Eucharist** we become what we eat; in **Reconciliation** we let God take away sins that keep us from shining in his light; in **marriage** we receive strength to lay down our lives for our spouses as Jesus laid down his life for us (Holy Orders, too); in **Confirmation** we receive Courage and Wisdom and other gifts that enable us to live as Jesus lived; in our **anointing** of the sick and dying we entrust our bodies to the merciful love of God just as Jesus did on the Cross.

**Being changed is not as easy as being taken care of, and so this can be a challenging vision.** And to be clear, Jesus, our Good Shepherd, continues to take care of us with gentle love, but it's so that we will be healed and strengthened to be his presence on earth. So that we will be able to love like him.

I think I mentioned in the past that **after college I lived in Seattle and was a member of St. Mary's Parish.** I loved it. Great preaching, friendly people, good music. I'd leave mass and go to the fellowship hall and chat with people and then, as a bonus, grab a loaf of bread from the commercial bakery that was next door, free for the taking on a big table near the door.

After about four months of enjoying this weekly Sunday morning experience, **Sr. Mary Hughes, affectionately but assertively put her arm around me and basically said, "I see you've been coming here and enjoying yourself—that's good! How about you help us out now.** We need someone to lead the Children's Liturgy of the Word every other Sunday. **Will you do that for us?"**

**Let me just say, I didn't want to.** I like being more of a consumer than a giver. **I liked being taken care of and wasn't sure I was up to taking care of others.** But I did it. It was hard, honestly. But after mass, in the fellowship hall, I **felt more connected to the folks.** I was caring for the children of some of them; I was an active part of the mission of the parish. **And the bread I took home, you know, it really tasted better...**

...Like Eucharist, when it is connected to the previous week's activity of service to family, friends, or parish or community...always has a richer flavor to us, for we are tasting what we are becoming.

While you cannot taste that flavor from our altar at this time of distance, I invite you to nonetheless savor your communion with him whose presence we are when we love one another.