

Fr. Curtis Miller May 24, 2020

Homily for the 7th Sunday of Easter

“After Jesus went up to Heaven.” These are the words that begin today’s first reading. “After.” That’s the time we’re in now, even today, the same as those first Apostles in the awkward, uncomfortable “after.” They had just spent three incredible years with Jesus, and in the previous couple months, they had experienced the depths of despair at Jesus’ death and the heights of glorious joy at His resurrection. Now that was over. Jesus had ascended back into Heaven. It must have been a strange feeling. Maybe they even felt numb as the reality set in that Jesus would not be walking at their side as He had before. It’s hard to live “after.”

But though Jesus has gone away, it is not to be apart from us, but rather so that He can prepare a place for us. He also promises to be with us always, even until the end of the age. We know that Jesus is with us particularly in the Eucharist, but also in more spiritual ways, like whenever two or more are gathered in His name, there is He present in our midst. And Jesus also promises that He will return to us one day, in His glorious second coming at the end of time, when all will be fulfilled.

So what do we do in the meantime? We watch and wait, striving to always be ready for His return. But we also have work to do. We don’t just stand there, staring at the sky. And what work do we have to do? We must build up God’s kingdom, here and now, as we prepare to enter His eternal kingdom one day. How do we build up God’s kingdom? By living as Jesus taught, by sharing our faith with others, by praying to God and inviting others to join us in prayer, by feeding the hungry and comforting the sorrowful, by being merciful and humble. Today’s second reading from St. Peter’s First Letter gives us some work to do, too: Rejoice when you share in Christ’s sufferings, looking forward to rejoicing when He returns; When you are insulted because of your faith in Christ, consider yourself blessed. By all these actions, we set an example for the people around us, not acting in the way they expect, but in an extraordinary way: the way of Jesus.

Now if Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us in Heaven, then we probably are wondering: What is Heaven like? Jesus tells us in today’s Gospel that eternal life is to know God the Father, and Him the Son, and the coming Holy Spirit, as the one, true God. Maybe that’s not the definition we were expecting; there’s nothing about clouds and a harp. Maybe just knowing God sounds boring or too abstract. But the truth is that there is nothing more exciting and glorious than really, truly knowing God. Think of anything wonderful: the joy of love, the beauty of nature, fun with friends, the awesome power of the universe. Where did this all come from? God. It was God Who made all these good things and gave them to us as gifts. And the Giver of such wondrous gifts is greater than the gifts themselves.

So let's open our minds and hearts to know and love God more today, so that even while life in this world is often hard and painful, we will allow ourselves to be lifted up into God's kingdom, so that we can start living eternal life with God right now.

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Let me conclude with one announcement. Bishop Coyne is permitting us to resume public Masses on Monday, June 1, with the first weekend Masses on June 6 and 7. Please spread the word, and also check out the bulletin online for some important guidelines and precautions to help protect each other's health. I look forward to praying with you in person again.