



Seventh Sunday of Lent - B

In the first reading (Acts 1:1-11) Luke states that in his first work, the gospel, he had dealt with the life of Jesus until He was taken up. How He had appeared to the disciples for forty days after His death, giving them many proofs that He was alive and instructed them through the Holy Spirit. How He had instructed them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait there for the Holy Spirit. When they asked Jesus if He was going to restore the kingdom of Israel at that time, He told them that it was not theirs to know but rather they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them and that they would become His witnesses to the very ends of the earth. Then He was lifted up in the air until a cloud took Him out of sight. As they watched this, suddenly two men dressed in white asked them why they were looking at the sky and said that Jesus, who had been taken from them, would return in the same way.

Something to Think About:

1. Jesus gave His disciples many proofs that He was alive after He rose from the dead. Today He continues to manifest that He is alive through the effects of His acting in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Do I dismiss out of hand the miracles I see daily as being someone's "good luck" or do I contemplate them in faith to know in my spirit and heart that Jesus was responsible for what had happened? Can I attribute miracles to a person's "good luck," if it happens over and over again? What would happen to my faith if each day I were to write down extraordinary experiences that occur and then review them at the end of the month? Would I know that Jesus is alive and working in my life and in the lives of others then?

2. Jesus charges His disciples with the mission to become His witnesses but before they are to begin this task they are to wait on the coming of the Holy Spirit. This process of discernment ought to be ours as well. Too often we get an idea and immediately begin to execute it without bringing it to the Lord.

We like to think that we are in control and that we are smart enough to handle everything by ourselves. Sometimes we guess it right but other times we are disappointed. The course that we had chosen may not bring us the happiness that we were looking for. Much better to bring decisions, particularly life-changing ones, to the Lord and seek His wisdom and counsel. If we wait, we will hear the Holy Spirit direct us what we are to do. If then, we chose to follow what we heard, we will come to know the peace and joy that is from the Lord. It is well worth the wait.

3. As we hear Luke describe the Ascension, the story of Jesus has come full circle. Jesus who is God and who became flesh has returned to His Father in glory. He had come not for His sake but for ours: to save us from sin and our alienation from God caused by disobedience. He gave us a glimpse of the unconditional love that the Father has for each of His creatures. And while He might at times be disappointed in some of our actions, Jesus shows us that His love never fails. The era of Jesus physical presence on earth is now complete and we enter the new era of the Holy Spirit and the Church. While Jesus is gone physically, He remains omni-present and always available to us. His Spirit dwells at the core of our being and continually divinizes us by the sanctifying grace we receive through the sacraments, helping us to become more and more like Jesus.

In the first option of the second reading (Eph 1:17-23) the author gives thanks to God for the faith of Ephesians and asks God to give them a Spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in the knowledge of the Father. He asks that the eyes of the heart be enlightened so that they may know the hope of His call, the riches of glory, the inheritance of the holy ones, and the surpassing greatest of His power that the Father worked in Christ by raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand far above all angels and all other creatures. The Father put all

things under Jesus' feet and made Him head of all things pertaining to the Church which is His body.

Something to Think About:

1. The author prays that the Ephesians will come to know God the Father. This is not an intellectual knowledge but an experience of knowing that the Father is real. If our faith is not as strong as we might like it to be, it would be good for us to pray that we too come to this sort of knowledge. God is real and He constantly seeks to reveal Himself to us.

However, if we are not reflective about the events that daily occur about us, it is easy for us to miss the signs that He is active in our lives. On the other hand, if we reflect on all the blessings that we receive each day we will come to know that God's Divine Providence is constantly looking after us. Then we will learn to watch for signs as they are happening and give thanks to God for His care for us.

2. From His position of authority in heaven above Jesus is head of the church and we, the members of the church, are His Body. We are the hands and feet that do Christ's work. As St. Teresa of Avila put it, "Christ has no body on earth, but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes from which the compassion of Christ will look out upon the world; yours are the feet with which Christ is to go about doing good and yours are the hands with which Christ is to bless us now." As a member of the Body of Christ, we have great resources and great responsibilities.

3. How important is it that I might know Jesus personally and not just about him and what he did and said while he was alive in Palestine 2000 years ago? All the good that I could ever desire comes from Him. Through Him I was created with a free will that I might choose to come to know Him and love Him. Through scripture I can come to know about Him but through the God-given gift of the Spirit of Wisdom I can come to know Him. This Wisdom is mine for the asking. Do I want it?

In the second option of the second reading (Eph 4:1-13) the author urges the Ephesians from prison to live worthily, with humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and to strive to preserve unity in peace. There is to be one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God of all who is over, through all and in them all. Jesus descended into the lower regions of the earth and then ascended above the heavens. He gave to the church people with different gifts to build up His body until it becomes fully mature.

Something to Think About:

1. The author lists the characteristics of those called by God. How would I grade myself against those characteristics? Humility: am I humble? Do I look on others as more important than myself? Must I always have my way, or can I defer to others? Gentleness: is my first reaction to strike out to something that I do not like? Do I believe that reason and kindness triumph over force? Forbearance: must I always demand my rights? Do I always exercise self-control? Unifier: do I seek to discover what is in common with others or do I judge and segregate? What ought I do to become more worthy of the call of Christ?

2. Jesus left his church with people with different gifts to bring his body to full maturity. Do I know my gifts? What do I like to do? What am I successful in doing? How can I use these gifts for the building up of the Body of Christ? What supernatural gifts has God given me? Which of these gifts should I pray to receive? How well do I use these gifts to help bring people to Christ?

In the gospel (Mk 16:15-20) Jesus tells his disciples to go out into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. Signs will accompany believers: they will drive out demons, speak new languages, and pick up serpents and drink deadly things but will not be harmed. They will lay hands on the sick and they will recover. Soon thereafter Jesus was taken up into heaven where He took His seat at the right hand of God. The disciples went out and preached everywhere. Their word was confirmed with accompanying signs.

Something to Think About:

1. Scholars generally agree that the verses of today's gospel were added to Mark's gospel at a later time. He had ended his work with the seemingly unsatisfactory ending of the women going to the tomb, finding it empty, and fleeing. These added verses are a summary of what was written in the other gospels. They relate the great commission to go out and baptize in the name of Jesus and that Jesus came into the world that He might save those who believe in Him.

2. As the Church in the USA is attacked by secular forces that are trying to silence the concept of God in the public forum, it becomes more incumbent on each of us to speak out. What is God asking me to do at the present time to assure that the next several generations of Catholics will be able to come to know God? How will my action or lack thereof affect the salvation of my children and my children's children?

How can I help young people to sort out the many voices that they hear which try to morally lead them away from God? How can I help them be more convinced of the truth and act on it?

3. Jesus sits before the throne of the Father as our advocate. Having been human like us in every way but sin He knows our weaknesses and petitions the Father on our behalf. Loving me to the point of choosing to die for me, there is nothing that He will not do for me now to help me reach my eternal destiny. He is forgiving and merciful to those who ask, but He will one day be my judge. How important is it for me to know Him personally?

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