

The Feast of the Ascension is an integral part of the Paschal Mystery—the life, death and resurrection of the Lord cannot be complete without the recognition that Jesus **MUST** move beyond the concrete confines of humanity’s ability to hold onto the physical body of the Lord. The Easter season reminds us that we live *mystery*, not empirical certainty. It is in faith that we accept the invitation that Jesus offers to move beyond what we can see and touch. We are reminded of Thomas’ proclamation after those first resurrection appearances to the disciples: “unless I see the nailmarks in His hands and put my hand into His side, I will not believe,” and Jesus’ question about Thomas’ faith: “do you believe because you have seen?” Faith always moves us beyond what our logical and rational minds demand, but it does not deny the gifts that our logical and rational minds offer. Faith and reason always work together, hand in hand and push us forward to go out into the world telling the Good News and inviting others to move out of fear and insecurity into hope.

As I mention in the announcement at the end of our filmed Mass this week, I so appreciate the image of the Lord that is behind the altar. Some have just acknowledged it as an image of the Resurrection, but I think it could be more appropriately identified as an image of the Ascension of the Lord. Our eyes are invited to look up, to see the face of the Lord who seeks to reveal the fullness of the promises of God fulfilled in His crucified self; to look up and see the goodness of the created world around us; to look up and to see those who accompany us in faith as brothers and sisters in the Lord. His arms are opened out to embrace us in our suffering and pain, in our weakness and in our doubt, and to embrace the whole world in the depth of love and mercy that the Father has for all of creation. His face looks upon us with compassion and encouragement, giving us strength to pick up our crosses, to follow Him to the Kingdom prepared for us.

The Feast of the Ascension is also the necessary step that must be taken for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Pentecost. Last week, we marveled at the Spirit given to the people of Samaria even before the event of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit, given to the Church is directed for specific and universal purposes—to proclaim the Risen Lord to the furthest ends of the earth, to proclaim love and mercy that never end, to reveal forgiveness of sins and a new relationship with God through the very person of God’s Son. Jesus must ascend beyond our sight so that we may move forward in faith, encouraged to live in love of the Lord through the mystery of the Spirit given to the Church. We live in hope that all will be fulfilled in the One who is with us until the end of the age. We are never abandoned, but always encouraged to leave fear and uncertainty behind to walk in the Kingdom, and to proclaim in joy the presence of the Lord.