

Homily

7th Sunday after Easter

May 28, 2017

In the Name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit, Amen

According to the Church's liturgical calendar, this past Thursday, marked the Ascension of our Risen Lord. The imagery of Jesus's ascension into heaven strikes most people as a rather curious episode.

Yet the event of the Ascension, which appears in both the New Testament books authored by Luke in his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, serves as a narrative lynchpin.

For forty days, beginning on Easter morning, our Risen Lord appeared to his disciples, and then vanished - appeared and then vanished again. We can be sure that each time the disciples experienced the presence of the risen Christ, their hearts and spirits were lifted and any doubts that Jesus was the Christ, faded.

The Ascension marked **the end** of the disciples' expectation of having him appear to them again as they lived out the rest of their lives here on earth.

It told them and us today, that rather than looking into the stars in order to try to determine God's will for our lives, rather than seeking to find God's presence in some state of spiritual oneness with our inner self, we are to look to the life of Christ.

Ascension Day is the day to remember that it's the Spirit at work in the church that makes all manner of impossible things possible - things a good deal more mystifying than Jesus rising into the air. His resurrection and ascension discloses the depth of God's love.

And we celebrate not only the Exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ to the supreme place of authority alongside the Father but also the raising of our human nature into the very centre of heaven.

Oswald Chambers, in his book of daily reflections, *My Utmost for His Highest*, a book that I read daily, links the Ascension of Christ with the Transfiguration. He says:

'On the Mount of the Ascension, the transfiguration is completed. If Jesus had gone to heaven from the Mount of Transfiguration, He would have gone alone; He would have been nothing more to us than a glorious Figure. But He came down from the Mount to identify Himself with humanity.

When Our Lord ascends back into his primal glory; He goes as the Son of Man; He deliberately limited omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience in Himself. However, He ascends as the Son of God as well. He is King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, from the day of His Ascension until now.

As we celebrate this morning the last Sunday of Easter, we heard in John's gospel, the final words of our Lord Jesus. These final words take place during his last supper with his disciples, prior to his arrest and crucifixion.

John's Gospel gives us a different perspective from the synoptic gospels. Before Jesus left to be betrayed, arrested and crucified, He tells the disciples of His divine relationship with His father; His mission of bringing God's grace to fruition for those who have been baptized into his death and resurrection.

It is a prayer that tells us that Jesus' submission to the cross was for our redemption, and that God makes us one with Him, just as Jesus is one with the Father. To be one with Christ is to be one with God.

In this prayer of our Lord for us we hear his words of invitation to ministry; a ministry entrusted to us: "as you Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me".

As the first disciples reflected upon this prayer of our Lord following His ascension, and prior to the gift of God's Spirit at Pentecost, this invitation had to be rather frightening for them.

It was a time of reflection for them; a time to think about what Jesus' death and resurrection really meant for their own lives. It was a time to examine their lives as they tried to come to terms with the meaning of His resurrection.

And no doubt, they reflected on His words; what they meant. And it couldn't have been easy for the disciples found it difficult to reach out with the Good News until they had been given the gift of God's Spirit at Pentecost.

We live in the time following all these events. We have heard the Gospel stories. We know that Christ was crucified, died, and rose from the grave. We know that after appearing to his disciples on numerous occasion for forty days, he ascended to be with His Father.

This seventh Sunday of Easter is a good time for us, like the first disciples, to pause, think, and reflect on the crucified, risen Son of God, and His word as recorded in the Scriptures. For they are His word to us.

Words that challenge us to hear our Lord's final prayer for us, his present-day disciples, to continue his ministry. To take the time to reflect on our ministry, how we live our lives in and with Christ. To seek and to pray. To commit.

And in all this, we need to remember to be patient in prayer. We can often become frustrated or discouraged when our prayers are not immediately answered in some way.

Jesus' instructions to his followers calls for mature faith; for learning how to live in patience by putting our concept of time aside and entering into God's time which is without beginning and end. No easy task. As the saying goes, 'simple, but not easy'.

However, we know in our hearts that His word is to be trusted: "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father."

We are not called without being equipped. In our witness as Christ's disciples, we are under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who softens hearts, opens ears and tight lips to help us communicate the good news to others.

Let us pray,

Almighty God, we give you thanks for revealing yourself to us through your Son, Jesus the Christ. We acknowledge him as our risen and ascended Lord. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, empower us to be his disciples, help us to discern your will for our lives, and give us the courage to proclaim His Gospel. This we ask in Christ's holy name. Amen.