

## Ascension Sunday

May 8, 2016

The Feast of the Ascension has got to be one of the most dramatic in the liturgical year. Not perhaps very dramatic in its liturgy which is the same as any other Sunday; but dramatic in what it is all about: the lifting up of the Risen Jesus to his place in heaven.

In the account given in the Acts of the Apostles Jesus was literally lifted up from the earth to heaven. And we can imagine the extraordinary impact that this had on the disciples as he was lifted up right in front of them until a cloud took him from their sight.

Then comes the appearance of two men in white who predict his return on the last day. Their words: 'What are you lookin' at' imply that the disciples should be getting off the bench and getting in the game as Jesus told them.

This feast of the Ascension then marks a fundamental change in the history of salvation. Christ, having completed his work on earth, returns to be with the Father.

And that marks the beginning of a new age, the age of the Church. The Ascension then becomes the springboard that catapults the mission of the Church into front and center. Jesus had to ascend before that mission of making disciples of all nations could go forward.

From that moment on, Jesus expects each of us to witness to his power and works.

Sometimes it's good to sit back and reflect on how we would act if we truly believed that Jesus came to earth as an infant, lived among us, was crucified for our sins, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is still present among us in Word and Sacrament.

Would we still treat one another with so little love and compassion? Would we neglect to take time to care for those who we consider our enemies? Would we continue to commit the same sins over and over again? If we're truly honest with ourselves, we have to admit that we're in the same boat as the disciples: we know Jesus is here, we worship, but sometimes we doubt.

Our Lord sees the struggles we have with our faith and so He sends His Holy Spirit to help us. The Holy Spirit encourages us and strengthens us so that we can carry out the mission of Christ: baptizing, teaching, and making disciples.

He's given us a Spirit of wisdom and revelation that gives us the belief and hope in Christ who walked on this earth *and* experienced our frustrations, temptations, and sufferings. He won't leave us - He loves us too much to abandon us to our own strength.

And we can also thank God that Christ doesn't send us out as disciples without the necessary spiritual strength of the Sacraments, especially Confession, Marriage and Holy Communion. Through these Sacraments, we are sustained to go out and bring God's kingdom to every corner of the world.

We do this because Jesus gives to us the very same instructions He gave to His disciples: "Go and make disciples of all nations . . . Remain in Me . . . Live on in My love . . . Take and eat . . . Take and drink . . . receive the Holy Spirit." These commands are meant to saturate every aspect of our lives.

The Sacraments are also valuable reminders that the mission Christ has given to us, ought to be performed with joy, perseverance, compassion and mercy.

Today it's very hard to escape all the prophets of doom and gloom and it's easy to live in fear of their grim predictions.

But what we really need to hear are the far more truthful and positive words of Jesus, who has all power in heaven and on earth, and who will never abandon us when we trust in his love. So absolute trust becomes the answer to our doubts.

So, during those times when we're struggling with our faith, our vocation or our ministry, remember that many others have struggled before us, all the way back to and including the apostles.

The Lord understands and He's walking beside us in our struggle like He did the apostles.

Finally, our Gospel reading tells us that after Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples worshipped him and went back to Jerusalem full of joy. That's exactly how it ought to be for us every Sunday as we return home from the Eucharist, going back to our ordinary lives full of joy and trust in the Lord.

Our neighbors see us go to Mass every Sunday morning. But it's how they see us coming back that is our real witness.