

Homily of Ascension of the Lord Year C

The idea that Jesus was a political messiah never left Jesus' disciples until the ascension of Jesus. They gave him a heroic welcome into Jerusalem believing that he had come to overthrow the Romans. Then he was arrested, crucified and buried. When Jesus reappeared, the disciples' conviction was even stronger that he was certainly going to overthrow the Romans at that time. We read, "When they had gathered together they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?" I guess that Jesus' reply bamboozled them further. Jesus replied, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The disciples might have wondered, "What's this man about? We are talking about the restoration of the kingdom of Israel, and he is talking about the Father and the Holy Spirit. What's the connection?" Probably that was why when Jesus disappeared into the cloud, in bewilderment they stood and gazed intently at the sky until the angels came to minister to them. Then, they returned to Jerusalem and remained together and gave themselves to constant prayer until they received the Holy Spirit that Jesus had promised them (Acts 1:12-14).

What does the Ascension of the Lord mean to us?

First, Jesus ascended into heaven and is at the right hand of God interceding for us. St. Paul confirms this, "Who will dare condemn them? Christ who died, and better still, rose and is seated at the right hand of God, interceding for us?" Jesus himself says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The Book of Hebrews speaks of Jesus, "Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). Also, 1 John 2:1, "We have an intercessor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Just One."

Second, Jesus says, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may be where I am" (John 14:3). The two angels who appeared to the disciples when Jesus ascended into heaven said to the disciples, "This Jesus has been taken up into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven." The Preface 1 of today's Eucharistic celebration says, "Mediator between God and man, judge of the world and Lord of hosts, he ascended, not to distance himself from our lowly state but that we, his members, might be confident of following where he, our Head and Founder, has gone before." We are, therefore, to be ready for his return and going with him. The Lord speaks of his coming in the Book of Revelations, "Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed" (Revelations 16:15).

Third, Jesus is no longer physically in the world. As his followers, we are to continue his good deeds by witnessing him to the world. He says, "You shall be my witnesses." Let us witness Jesus in such a way that at our last moment he will say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things... Come and share your master's happiness" (Matthew 25:23). Jesus is no longer physically in the world; but he remains in the world through us, his disciples, his ambassadors, his witnesses. We are his mouth, his hand, his feet, and his heart.

Christ has no body now but yours.

No hands, no feet on earth but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world.

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.

Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

(Teresa of Avila)