

Homily of Ascension of the Lord Year A 2020

Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47:2-9; Ephesians 1:17-23; Matthew 28:16-20

The idea that Jesus was a political messiah never left Jesus' disciples even when Jesus was about to ascend into heaven. Jesus' disciples 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 of his political messiahship became stronger. 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' answer 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 talking 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, the apostles stood in bewilderment 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 go 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, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem ... and to the ends of the earth." Jesus remains in the world through us who are his disciples, ambassadors, and 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 with 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)

Fourth, the celebration of the Ascension of the Lord profoundly signals us to reflect on our relationship with the Holy Spirit, and invites us to revive and renew the relationship. Jesus says that he had to ascend for the Holy Spirit to descend: "But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). Jesus also says, "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name; he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you" (John 14:26).

Before his ascension, Jesus commanded his apostles, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." We are in an era when many challenges discourage or prevent Christians from carrying out effectively Jesus' command. Through the graces of this celebration and by the unction of the Holy Spirit may we continue to overcome the challenges and fulfill Jesus' commands. Amen.

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