



The Holy Spirit Province NEWSLETTER

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OUR SHARED DESTINY: THE ASCENSION

In our Creed today we will be saying of Jesus: '... he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.' What picture comes to mind when we think of Jesus ascending into heaven? Do we picture him moving through the clouds like a space ship at Cape Canaveral? If we do, we don't realize that those words are not to be taken literally. They are a poetic way of saying that In his risen transformed body Jesus is no longer on earth in a physical and material way. He has gone to God and now lives with God in light, joy and glory.

And yet, in the words of our psalm today, in going to God he became 'great king over all the earth'. He is still among us, then, and we continue to experience his presence, guidance and love in special ways. In our being with one another and sharing our lives! In taking to heart the words and messages in the Readings about him! In coming to his table and being fed, nourished and refreshed by him! In the leadership of our priests! In the acceptance, inspiration and encouragement from our fellow parishioners and others! In our efforts to make the world a better place by our compassionate outreach to needy people!

In short, as we keep on being 'good news' people, Jesus our Risen Lord stays with us. In the words of our Gospel today, he stays with us 'confirming the word by the signs which accompany it' (Mark 16:20).

Today, however, we might also recognise his ascension as his destiny, and express our joy that at the end of his life's journey, God raised him to life and took him to himself for the eternal embrace of love that we call 'heaven'. Like ourselves Jesus dreamt of this day. With his whole being he longed to see God face-to-face, and to enjoy without distraction the mutual love for which we are all created, and for which deep down we all yearn. Since we admire, respect and love Jesus so much, we are very happy for him that he has reached his destination, and that his time of waiting and suffering are over. Nothing can come between the longings of his heart and the joy of their fulfilment in God.

So he remains forever with both God the Father and with us who are now his body on earth. Though 'seated at the right hand of the Father' as we pray in the Gloria, his heart reaches out to us beyond all limits of space and time. This is just as he promised:

‘When I am lifted up from the earth I shall draw everyone to myself’ (John 12:32). Through his powerful presence to us he keeps bringing about the reign of God’s love in our broken world, even when both as individuals and communities we reject his love by falling into sin. But nothing or no one can stop the love of God for us that keeps on burning in the great heart of Jesus.

Thankfully, millions of men and women, boys and girls, keep accepting, welcoming, and living this love. They keep responding to it with the gift of their lives. Some even do so to the point of heroism, by literally laying down their lives for Christ. In fact, to look at the big picture, for all the horrors of hate, anger and violence that swirl around us, there is much more love happening in our world than hate, anger and violence.

Our Feast of the Ascension today reminds us overall that the goal of our life is the same as his. We, and everyone else, are called like Jesus to enjoy without distraction or hindrance, the company of God for ever.

Finally, our celebration of his ascension reminds us to let ourselves experience the absence of Jesus as well as his presence. Like his first followers we are sad at his not being here with us in the flesh, where we might see him, touch him and be loved by him in the ways we meet one another. But missing his physical presence reminds us that we are not meant to find our final home in this world, and must keep walking our own individual journeys of both joy and suffering as he did.

Meanwhile, let him encourage us with his Last Supper words: ‘I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, you may also be’ (John 14:3). Let him encourage us too with his Last Supper prayer: ‘Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me ...’ (John 17:24). Meanwhile too, let these words from the Preface of our Feast also encourage us: ‘Christ has passed beyond our sight, not to abandon us but to be our hope. He is the head of the church; where he has gone, we hope to follow.’

For the blessing, then, of our shared destiny, let us give sincere and heartfelt thanks to God, in the rest of our Eucharist today!

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