

Ascension Cycle B

Most often people remember the last part of a reading or of a conversation so let us begin with the ascension which is the last part of today's Gospel. Ascension Sunday is a significant event in our tradition. It commemorates Jesus Christ ascending into heaven, which occurred 40 days after His resurrection. The ascension also marks the beginning of the Apostles ministry.

In today's reading we hear that Jesus ascended. Before Jesus could ascend, He had to descend. We proclaim in the Creed that Jesus "descended into Hell on the third he rose again, He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father." Jesus "did not descend into hell to deliver the damned, nor to destroy the hell of damnation, but to free the just who had gone before him" (CCC 633). Jesus descended to rescue those who had died before the gates of heaven were opened.

St. Pope John Paul II states, "During his earthly life, Jesus was the Prophet of the kingdom; after his passion, resurrection and ascension into heaven he shares in God's power and in his dominion over the world (cf. Mt 28:18; Acts 2:36; Eph 1:18–21)." We recognize Jesus as Priest, Prophet, and King. Jesus is King of heaven and earth. He reigns always and everywhere. When Jesus ascended, I am sure the Apostles must have felt abandoned, alone perhaps even thinking now what do we do.

God's plan is and always will be the perfect plan so shortly afterward the Apostles experienced something powerful which completely transforms them; receiving the Holy Spirit which occurs on Pentecost. God's plan is to have us receive the sacraments of the church so we too may receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Through our free will we choose to receive the gifts of the Sacraments which then produce fruits. We must allow Jesus to abide/remain in us so we too may fully receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

St. Augustine writes, "for just as he remained with us even after his ascension, so we too are already in heaven with him, even though what is promised us has not yet been fulfilled in our bodies. Christ is now exalted above the heavens, but he still suffers on earth all the pain that we, the members of his body have to bear. He showed this when he cried out from above: *Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?* And when he said: *I was hungry and you gave me food.*" St. Augustine points to the fact that Jesus is with us now and forever. Jesus goes before us in glory, yet He stills suffers for and with each one of us.

Now let's look at the beginning of today's Gospel reading, the mission. Jesus directs the Apostles to their mission, which is also the mission of the Church which

is to go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel. To baptize, drive out demons. In short to evangelize. Jesus leaves the church with sacraments. The CCC defines a sacrament as “An efficacious [capable of having the desired effect] sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit (CCC 774, 1131).” So even though Jesus ascended, He gave the Apostles all the tools they needed.

Jesus instructed the Apostles to Baptize. To seal the recipient with the gifts of faith, hope and love, to seal them with the Holy Spirit. As St Augustine so clearly explains Jesus is with us here on earth and in heaven. He is here with us now and always. Through our Sacraments we grow in relationship with our Lord, we allow the Holy Spirit to remain in us.

God allows us to have free will. We choose to receive the Sacraments, my friends we must allow Jesus to abide/remain in us so we may receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit and promise of eternal life. Receiving these gifts does come at a cost. The cost is to share, to evangelize or more simply put we are called to make a friend, be a friend and bring a friend to Christ.

The Ascension is a difficult concept to understand and grasp. Through faith we can and do accept Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. Through faith we accept that Jesus is the head of the Church, and we are the body. In the Creed we profess our faith, we profess that Jesus ascended into heaven. But let us not forget our mission. As the body of the Church we lead by example, by receiving the sacraments and sharing our faith by our actions.

Let me end with a quote from St Augustine’s homily on the Ascension, “The miracle of the Ascension brings joy to our hearts. The Ascension reminds us of Jesus’ power, His promise, and His presence among us. May our belief in these things brings joy to our hearts, purpose to our lives, and praise to our lips. Let our hearts ascend with Him.” My friends may we know, serve and love God more today than yesterday.