

## Sunday of the Ascension of the Lord

**Act 1:1-11; Ps 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9; Eph 1:17-23; Mt 28:16-20**

Today is the celebration of the Ascension of Jesus. (The Ascension was technically last Thursday, 40 days after Jesus' resurrection). However, the Church offers an option to celebrate the Ascension on the following Sunday. The Ascension is the fulfillment and culmination of Jesus' ministry on earth. It is a Holy Day of Obligation (Unless you are in a global pandemic). Of the four vital and life altering realities of Jesus' life and our salvation: Jesus' Birth, Passion, Resurrection and Ascension, the Ascension is the least recognized. Yet, without the Ascension of Jesus, his life, death, resurrection and ministry would be lacking its great fulfillment: Jesus' **Reign, Rule, and promise to Return.**

First, the Ascension inaugurates Jesus' **Reign** as King of heaven and earth. Through the Ascension, Jesus takes his rightful place at the right hand of God. The Nicene Creed says, "He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father from where he shall come to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end." Jesus says to his disciples, just prior to his ascension, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me..."

In our second reading, Paul describes Jesus reign with these words, "Raising him (Jesus) from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens, far above every principality, authority, power, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way."

Through God's mighty plan and by the mystery of the Ascension, Jesus Reigns.

Secondly, the Ascension of Jesus reveals his eternal **Rule**. The rule of Jesus is marked by compassion, collaboration and communion. Jesus' rule is one of compassion. The writer of Hebrews states, "We have a great High Priest who has gone (ascended) into the heavens. Our High Priest is not one who cannot feel sympathy for our weaknesses. On the contrary, he was tempted in every way that we are yet was without sin. Therefore, let us approach God's throne with boldness where we will receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need."

The eternal rule of God is a rule of grace and mercy, a rule of forgiveness, understanding and peace.

In addition, the rule of Jesus is one based on collaboration. In fact, in his eternal glory, Jesus sends us his very spirit. Jesus said to his disciples before he ascended, "It is better that I go to the Father, because if I go to the father I will give you the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit is the love, presence, truth and power of God -- the overflowing love between the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is our advocate, one who prays for us, encourages us, and empowers us on the journey. The Holy Spirit offers us not only the power of God, but also Jesus' presence in us and through us.

In our first reading in Acts, Jesus requests that the believers wait in Jerusalem for the gift of God, the Holy Spirit. We will celebrate Pentecost, the sending of the Holy Spirit next Sunday. The connection between Jesus' Ascension and Pentecost reveals that the rule of Jesus is a rule of collaboration, of shared power and mutual respect among all the people of God. Jesus doesn't lord authority over us, but as our head, offers us his very power and presence.

As I reflect on the future of the Church, I believe the Ascension of Jesus and the humble offering of his Spirit to empower his people, his very body, is a lesson for all those who are in positions of authority in the Church. The Ascension reveals that Jesus, our eternal High Priest, gave his Spirit freely to all the people of God. Jesus' rule of collaboration invites church leaders to support, respect and embrace (to a greater extent than ever before) the priesthood of all believers and the true gift and treasure of the laity.

In addition, the rule of Jesus is a rule of communion. By communion I mean unity with God. Jesus promises us that he will be with us always. Paul says, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The Ascension reveals in a unique way Jesus' desire to live in fellowship and communion with us. He knew that it was better that he ascended to the Father so that through the Spirit, he would be with us always and everywhere. Also, as we read two weeks ago in John's Gospel, Jesus said, "He was going to the Father to prepare a place for us and that he will come back again to take us to himself so that where he is we may be also."

I pray Jesus' compassion, collaboration and communion will inspire the rules of our own lives. Since Jesus is the Head of the Church and we are his body, we are also called to be people of compassion, collaboration and communion.

Furthermore, the Ascension of Jesus ushers the promise of his glorious **Return**. Luke tells us in our first reading, "as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight. While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven."

Jesus will return! Our Reigning Lord will come back. Amen!

I wonder who anticipates Jesus' return more, Jesus or us? I long for Jesus' return, yet, I have a feeling that Jesus' love for us, which far exceeds our love for him, causes an anticipation in him far deeper than our own.

Finally, Jesus' pending return calls us to action. We are not called to "stand looking at heaven." Instead, we are called to "Go make disciples of all nations..." We are called to be his witnesses in Juneau, Southeast Alaska and to the ends of the earth. We are called, through the Ascension and by the power of the Holy Spirit to share God's love and mercy to the world.

As we slowly but surely come out of this unique pandemic, may the Ascension of Jesus, his Reign, Rule and glorious Return inspire us to action and lead us ever closer to the heart of God.

I will pray for you and I ask that you pray for me.

God bless you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Deacon Steve