

HOMILY by Fr. Anthony Davis

"After 40 days, the Lord Jesus was taken up into heaven...And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God."

June 2, 2019

The Feast of the Ascension of the Lord (Year C)

Acts 1:1-11; Luke 24:46-53

Today's readings describe the Ascension of the Lord Jesus his Heavenly glory after promising to send the Apostles the Holy Spirit as the source of Heavenly power and commanding them to bear witness to Him through their lives and preaching throughout the world. But the ascended Jesus is still with us because of His promise, **"I am with you always; yes, to the end of time"** (Matt. 28:20). This means, He is with us at all times and in all places, releasing a new energy upon the earth, the energy of the Holy Spirit.

Why did Jesus leave his disciples forty days after his resurrection? Forty is a significant number in the Scriptures. Moses went to the mountain to seek the face of God for forty days in prayer and fasting. The people of Israel were in the wilderness for forty years in preparation for their entry into the promised land. Elijah fasted for forty days as he journeyed in the wilderness to the mountain of God. For forty days after his resurrection Jesus appeared numerous times to his disciples to assure them that he had risen indeed and to prepare them for the task of carrying on the work which he began during his earthly ministry.

Significance: Jesus' departure and ascension into heaven was both an end and a beginning for his disciples. While it was the end of Jesus' physical presence with his beloved disciples, it marked the beginning of Jesus' presence with them in a new way.

Hence, now as the glorified and risen Lord and Savior, ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven, **Jesus promised to send them the Holy Spirit who would anoint them with power from on high on the Feast of Pentecost, just as Jesus was anointed for his ministry at the River Jordan (Luke 3:21-22, 4:1,18).** That explains why, when the

Lord Jesus departed physically from the apostles, they were not left in sorrow or grief. Instead, they were filled with joy and with great anticipation for the coming of the Holy

Spirit. In other words, Jesus is with us at all times and in all places, releasing a new energy upon the earth, the energy of the Holy Spirit Who enables us to preach his Good News of salvation and to bear witness to him in living out His word.

Thus, today's feast is the celebration of Jesus' glory after his suffering and death – the glory in which we also hope to share. The Ascension and Pentecost, together, mark the beginning of the Church. This means that the feast of the Ascension tells us that the Church must be a community in mission, guided by the Holy Spirit and confident of God's protection even amid suffering and death.

And so today's liturgy communicates the Ascension's significance for us: **“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”** (Preface I of the Ascension of the Lord).

Life message: *We need to be proclaimers and evangelizers:* In today's Gospel, Jesus gives this mission to all the believers: **“Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.”** This mission is not given to a select few but to all believers. *Thus to be a Christian is to be a proclaimer and an evangelizer.* There is a difference between preaching and proclaiming. **“We preach with words but we proclaim with our lives.”**

SUMMARY: As we celebrate the Lord's return to His Father in Heaven – His Ascension -- we are being commissioned to go forth and proclaim the Gospel of life and love, of hope and peace, by the witness of our lives. **Apparently, Jesus' exaltation and final blessing, gave the Apostles, as it gives us, the assurance that, though absent, Jesus is still present, present even in the pain and sorrow we undergo.** That is why **St. Augustine** assures us, **“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.' While in Heaven he is also with us; and while on earth we are with him...by the love we share with each other...”**

Therefore, on this day of hope, encouragement and commissioning, let us renew our commitment to be true disciples everywhere we go, beginning with our family and our parish, **“living in a manner worthy of the call [we] have received.”**