

Sermon for Ascension Day

May 29, 2025

St. Joseph Parish

Father Herb

Happy Feast Day, Beloved!

The Collect we prayed earlier says, "As we believe Christ is now ascended into the heavens, let us in heart and mind thither ascend". This a day of great theological importance..AND a day of blessed assurance for us.

While Luke was not an eyewitness to the resurrection of Jesus, he is the only gospel writer to tell us what the apostles witnessed at our Savior's Ascension. He does in both the Epistle and Gospel today. Luke gives us his detailed description of what happened at the edge of earthly history, where God altered all Christians' destiny on the Mount of Olives. Luke's description of the event makes him sound like he was there.

"At the edge" because, as in the Transfiguration and the Resurrection, the event takes place, on one side of the edge, in the disciple's lives on earth, but it could only have taken place in the timelessness of God and His supernatural power breaking in upon them from the other side, from eternity, where the Father's plans for His world gestate..

We hear from the gospel that the apostles returned to Jerusalem rejoicing after watching the Lord's ascent. We don't know from Luke the exact incentive for their rejoicing. But I think we might..in all likelihood it was.. words of blessed assurance from the white robed angels at the disciples' side..just as they were at our Lord's Transfiguration.

A lot of what many are internally unassured about concerning their eventual fates is settled here in our hearing..by God the Father taking up Jesus in His glorified body. The two angels in divine white are sent from God for the sake of the apostles.. and us. While they are present, they settle the hearts and guide the expectations of the apostles who are straining their necks upward looking for Jesus to come back down to them imminently. The presence of these "comforters", with a small "C", is a kind of prelude to the

Paraclete's descent to us the Sunday after next. The words they speak of the future reassure us that the Ascension cannot be conceived of as an event "within history" alone. Indeed, the gift of comprehension comes through the Spirit Jesus breathed on them and into the hearts of faith which trust in God's promise of eternal life.

For as we know from studying both testaments, our God is a God of promises spoken for the sake of human history. Whether from reading scripture or church history, or reflecting on one's life experience, we know His habits. He can't help Himself from breaking into our history to rescue us, and He has been guiding our lives' histories ..from a place where there is no time. But if we are in Christ and Christ is in us, Jesus' glorified body ascending reveals to us our eventual fate..going home to God in glory at the end of time.

In his earliest epistle, the first letter to the Thessalonians, St. Paul reassures those who also waited for an imminent return: "for the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with him in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord... Blessed Assurance!.St. Paul confirms our hope.

If we look at the Salvador Dali painting in our library, we, who are made of dust as Jesus incarnate was, should be reassured by seeing Jesus' dirty feet. We see Jesus' body ascending from the apostles' point of view..and ours.

Once in heaven, the dust of the earth on Jesus' feet lies scattered on the floor of the throne of the Majesty on high. Here Christ sits at the right hand of God the Father. Our incarnate Lord, born of Mary, was a man made of dust, too. And if the divine person on God's right hand has dirty feet, and knows in the flesh he assumed what it is to be fully human, made of dust, and that person is coming at the end of time to be our judge, we can be reassured our judgment will be served with the full understanding of what it means to be fully human..Rejoice! Blessed Assurance.

Where will we give place for the gift of the Comforter, who comes to us imminently, on Pentecost? In the heart.. so we can listen to His counsel and guidance. Can you confirm that? Are our hearts prepared to hear His Spirit's voice despite all the noise that they and our minds generate between them in their conflicting conversations? And looking into our hearts, survey all the idols that we've allowed to take up residence ..idols so densely accumulated that they act like a spiritual sound barrier. They take up space that God made to be sanctified: for His Son alone! The derivation of the word "sanctify" means just exactly that in the biblical Greek: to make room for only one Sovereign. We've heard this from scripture before: "Sanctify yourselves..for a feast today..for a fast" later..AMEN.

Jesus' ascension at God's right hand marks, too, His royal enthronement. From his throne in heaven, Jesus, Son of David, does rule in this world despite all the worldly kingdoms vying for primacy, but destined to fall. He is taking over hearts and minds silently, unknowingly, step by step, for the Kingdom of God is like a ghost who is not only holy, but stealthy. This is a truth, even if Satan, who after the Resurrection is in retreat knowing victory will not be his, is still fighting a rearguard action to take over God's throne, entice us and enlist us. You know he has, does, and will try with all his dark might to pull the heavenly seat we trust will be ours, that one Jesus promised, out from under us and we will fall.

Even if this world, and we know this well, is unwilling to notice Christ's gathering sovereignty, we, as vassals in freedom to our King, do so. We choose to give Him the sovereignty He seeks His, His rightful place, within the heart. What a difference there now is in a full heart and an expectant mind! We now have an all-knowing, most merciful and benevolent King ascending to the throne of our hearts. Rejoice! The rest.. and the end of our lives will be our ascended Lord's to rule..and then, blessed assurance, ourselves ascending with Him in the clouds, we will follow His way home.