

Sunday after Ascension 2026

Sermon - Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Acts 1.1-11 1 Peter 4.7-11 St. John 15.26-16.1

✠

“When the Holy Spirit comes upon you”...Jesus said to his friends... “you will be filled with power and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” After Jesus said this, he was taken up to heaven and as they watched him, a cloud hid him from their sight. The last glimpse of Jesus his friends saw were his bare feet.

During the reading of the Gospel at the Ascension Day Mass, we acted out liturgically what the disciples experienced first hand. We extinguished the Paschal Candle, that was first lighted on Easter Even as we chanted...“Lumina Christi”..“the Light of Christ”...symbolizing Jesus the Light of the World has gone back to heaven, just as he said he would.

Jesus, of course didn't leave his friends alone and without help to do their mission to the world and he doesn't leave us alone and without help either. He has given us the ultimate assurance of his constant, enduring, presence and companionship. Matthew records Jesus' final words before he was taken up into heaven...“and I will be with you always, to the end of the age.”

When Jesus went back to heaven he took his body with him, feet and all. It was a resurrected and glorified body but it was a body, not an apparition or a ghost. When Jesus returns at the “end of the age”...and we don't know when that will happen... he will take us back to heaven with him, in our resurrected and glorified bodies, feet and all. We state explicitly in the Apostles' Creed we believe in the Resurrection of the Body...not the continuation of a disembodied spirit.

The angels promised the disciples they would see Jesus return one day, and it is always our hope and prayer that Jesus will return soon. But what Ascension Day and Ascensiontide teach us is that the disciples' mission and our own is here on earth...right now...in our Parish...in our homes...in the cities in which we live and work. Our mission is to try to figure out how God wants us to use our time while we wait for Jesus to return.

Peter offers us some practical advice about our mission in the Epistle for the Sunday after the Ascension: We must be self-controlled, alert, and pray continuously. Our love for each other must be sincere, because love covers many sins. We should always show hospitality toward each other. Each one of us has a special gift from God, which we must always use wisely for the good of others.

The Ascension of Jesus into heaven presented a real challenge for the disciples. They stood in awe and disbelief as they watched Jesus go back to heaven. Saint Luke writes, "...their eyes were fixed on the sky." They did not understand what they had just witnessed. They could not possibly have understood Jesus' powerful words of assurance with the Helper he promised he would send them. They needed the power of the Holy Spirit to transform their lives and to make it clear their mission was just starting. Their mission was to take Jesus, the Light of the World, to everyone...to every corner of the world.

The Ascension of Jesus into heaven also presents a challenge for us. We have an advantage over the disciples because we know what happened next...the Holy Spirit would come to make things clear to them. But we ask the same question they asked Jesus..."When will we get to experience the Kingdom of Heaven?" Jesus tells us God has his own timetable for making things happen. We shouldn't spend time worrying about when the "end of the age" will happen. God has us covered.

Our mission is here and now and it is clear what we should be doing. We should follow Peter's instructions. We should also be praying for peace throughout the world; we should be praying the hearts of evildoers will be changed into doing good; we should be asking God for healing of body and soul; we should welcome and show hospitality toward others; and in everything we do we must show love.

Jesus said we are his witnesses right now and until he returns to take us to heaven. His mission is complete; ours has just begun. Let us pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to transform our lives and to guide us and help us do our mission well.

✠