

As He Has Loved Us
May 16, 2021, Ascension of the Lord
Gospel of Mark 16:15-20
Fr. Brad

This weekend, we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord. This feast is a powerful reminder to us of the mission Jesus gave initially to His apostles and now gives to each one of us...his disciples of today.

Perhaps the first thing to note is that the Ascension is not about disappearing upward and leaving us alone to figure things out. Jesus the Christ transcends time and space upon his ascension into heaven. He has not ascended just to watch the goings on from on high, but to continue His work through us. He becomes the director of operations through the Holy Spirit.

In the first reading from Acts, Jesus, after the resurrection, calls upon His apostles to wait for the promise of the Father. Notice how they ask Him if this is the time when Israel will be restored? Jesus says, '**wait**, it is not for anyone to know the times or periods that the Father has set by His own authority.' In other words we have to get used to the reality of 'not knowing.' The timing of things and the specific ways of God are beyond us. They would have to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. How often do we...over anticipate the ways of God and cast judgements on others and their actions because it's not the way we would approach things. And most of the time we think we are doing the right thing. Our consciousness awareness needs to be informed from beyond our own human and all too often, impulsive resources.

Another point to note, Jesus calls us to be His **witnesses in the world**. We are quite familiar with the notion 'Do unto others **as you would have them do unto you**. Note however, that Jesus ups things a notch by saying, 'Do unto others **as I have loved you**.' This takes things to another level. This gives a new perspective on self-giving and giving up one's life for the sake of others.

He teaches us to love others beyond just being cordial and nice. His love challenges us to stretch our hearts and ourselves to reach out in larger ways - - to stretch our perspective to a more inclusive perspective. Can we put out more than we expect to receive in return?

For example, we may be called to speak out and act in our public and private lives, in ways consistent with the example that Jesus has given to us; or to share with others our own experiences of faith by sharing our beliefs and our own search for the truth; or by taking on the responsibility of teaching our children about God's Church; or by making efforts to stay informed ourselves about the teachings of the Church.

St. Cecilia has done a good job over the years and to this day of gathering and welcoming into a sense of community, many who have come from outside into our Christian community, our country and our culture. We can help others through difficult times in their lives by just being present and listening.

Soon we will be able to visit each other pastorally in person, particularly shut-ins who are in a way, starving for personal visits. Aiding and comforting those who are sick or disabled, defending the rights of the unborn and terminally ill. We are called to reach out to all of Jesus' *'little ones'*, particularly the most vulnerable and those unable to fend for themselves.

As Jesus did, we are asked to put ourselves, our time, and our resources at the disposal of others. This is the mission Jesus gave to us upon his return to the Father at the Ascension. And although we cannot, each of us go into all the world (especially right now), that time will return and we'll have opportunities to resume or begin anew a profound response to the call.

In Ephesians, Paul exhorts us to live a life worthy of our calling. The grace to carry out our missions is given according to the measure of Christ's gift to each of us.

Upon the Ascension, these gifts were bestowed upon the apostles with the intent of passing the message and tasks on to the world and ultimately to us today, tasks just right for each one of us. The action of descending and ascending to Heaven, equips the saints with different gifts to build the Body of Christ. We receive the torch and we pass it on. There are ways of being self aware that dispose us more readily to the promptings of our call.

At a personal level, know your strengths and weaknesses. Know you can't be all things to all people. Know also at the other extreme, that you still do have a part to play even if you may think your contribution is unimportant or irrelevant. Always remember God's perspective is infinitely greater than each of our own. Encourage one another in the exercising of their gifts. Recognize when you are encouraging and building up another person and conversely, when you are putting another person down verbally or in your mind and then, ask yourself why you are doing that?

We are called to accept and use the gifts bestowed upon us for the building up of others in their gifts. It is only in this way, that we fulfill the plan of achieving full stature and maturity in the Body of Christ.

We were given the responsibility of loving each other. In our humanness, there will always be those we don't like, but we are still tasked with the responsibility of loving them as Jesus loves - - unconditionally.

In the Gospel, we are reminded that we are not left alone to carry out these tasks. The Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by signs. He works with us as well.

God gives us assurance of His ongoing working and abiding presence in our lives. This gives us comfort and consolation at a deeper level even though it is costly to our personal lives and personal preferences.

Remember also, the profound mystery at the center of the Ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. We cannot understand it, and we cannot dismiss it. Where our reason and logic fail, our faith in the sacred mystery carries on. As Mother Teresa once said, *'I don't pray for success; I pray I may be a faithful witness.'* May the grace of this Eucharistic celebration strengthen us in our witness. Amen