

From The Pastor

The feast of the Ascension is one of triumphant hope in the promises of Jesus and the life he has given us. Before we get more deeply into these themes, I am gratefully hopeful on the terrific response to the CSA. By all accounts, we are within a few dollars of making our goal in only two weeks time. I think this is amazing, and I want to affirm you again for your generous and timely response to this annual appeal.

The tables will be set up one more week in the back of Church for your convenience in making a gift or pledge. Stewardship members will be present to assist you. This continues to be a most important time in our appeal as any monies now collected will be returned to the parish after our goal has been met downtown. I want to encourage anyone who has not yet taken the opportunity to make a gift to please do so. We need your participation and sharing in this effort. Your gifts will help strengthen our finances as a parish. Please be a part of this impressive year of generosity.

On another note, we are in need of names for the Parish Council. To date we have only one name for three vacancies on the Council. This important consultative body gives insight and direction for the life and health of the parish. We are looking for persons interested in sharing ideas and cooperatively collaborating with others through creative ideas and projects to enhance our parish life. Please consider this appeal. Generous financial giving is essential to healthy parish life, yet it is the personal investment of many committed individuals that really moves a parish forward. More persons are needed this week so names can be drawn at Mass on Pentecost Sunday. Thank you for your prayerful consideration.

The feast of the Ascension is a powerful time of transition and transformation for both Jesus and the disciples. It is also a time of profound formation and movement into the next stage of God's plan for the fulfillment of the Kingdom. Now the Church is born through the faith and witness of the early disciples soon to be forever changed by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Ascension concludes the time of Jesus on earth through his Incarnation through the Virgin Mary. Jesus now ascends in his glorified, Resurrected body to take his place as King of Creation and Lord over all. This however, does not mean that the experience of the Incarnation is over. Now the divine Christ, Risen from the dead, is enfleshed in all who believe in him. This is the power and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus given to all who seek to know and follow Him in love. At the Ascension, Jesus tells the disciples to 'stay in the city' to await the gift of the Father promised to them. This is the cue that one act of God's saving work has ended, and another action of God is about to take place. The time of Jesus in the flesh is over. Now the time of Jesus through the Holy Spirit will begin to bring the work of Jesus to its completion.

Notice the joyful hope of the disciples as they watch Jesus ascends to the heavens. They return to Jerusalem with great joy and fill the temple with their praise. The preceding verse of today's gospel tells us why. Not yet fully empowered by the Spirit, Jesus has 'opened their minds to the understanding of all scripture'. They have been enlightened to understand all that has happened, and what is to yet come. How could they not be filled with joy at this understanding?

So what about us? What does the Ascension mean today? Today, the Ascension means the same as it meant on the day Jesus rose to the heavens. We are now in the power of the divine redemption given by God in Christ Jesus. Our lives should be filled with joyful hope in all that God has promised and made possible through Jesus. Despite the painful incompleteness of our lives, the angry violence in the world, the darkness of oppression and poverty, and all other social and moral ills, God's power remains present to bring all things under the divine authority.

We are in the time of the Holy Spirit. The essential work of our lives in the Spirit is the acceptance and integration of divine love. Will we allow what God has accomplished and promised in Jesus to be a deep peace and joy in our lives despite the wrongs in the world? Will we allow God to use us as the incarnate presence of the Lord in the world today to continue to bring forth the Kingdom of God? How do we see our lives as instruments of God as followers of Jesus? The disciples didn't stay in the temple forever praising God. Once empowered by the Spirit they went out and preached, and witnessed in word and deed all that Jesus taught them. This is our call as well. We can't stay in church practicing religion. We have to leave church and live lives of love and justice in the joy of the Holy Spirit.

The Ascension is a time for vision. What is the vision you hold for your life as a Christian? What hope and joy does your life hold because you follow the Lord? Are you growing in love, allowing love to change you more and more into the image of Christ? This sounds all spiritualized and ideal, yet it is the reality of how we are to live each day. None of us will be here forever. Ours is a transitional existence here as we make our way with joyful hope to the promise of heaven. What are we doing along the way to reveal the joy and peace of Christ?

Father John Esper