

SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION 2015

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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ACTS 1.1 LUKE 24.49 | ST. PETER 4.7



God goes up to his throne...there are shouts of joy and the blast of trumpets...as the Lord goes up... prophetic words of Psalm 47...written about 1000 years before the Ascension.

Jesus has been preparing his disciples for several weeks for this moment...his Ascension back to the Father in heaven...the completion of his physical presence on earth...the culmination of the Mystery of the Incarnation...God became a human being and walked among us...so one day we might walk with him in heaven.

It was a poignant good-bye...a short walk with his Disciples to Bethany...some additional words of assurance...the promise he would send them a Helper...and as he blessed them he was taken up into the air. The last glimpse of Jesus we have...his feet taken up into a cloud surrounded by bright white light.

This morning we paused briefly during the reading of the Gospel to commemorate this event...the Paschal Candle that has burned at all services since Easter was put out...the liturgical reenactment of Jesus' return to heaven...the anticipation of the next big event...Pentecost...the arrival of the Helper Jesus promised he would send...and the Church's birthday.

In today's Order of Service is an insert...Salvador Dali's surrealist painting *The Ascension of Christ*. Dali was born in Figueres, Catalonia, Spain, in 1904 and died in the same place in 1989. He can best be described as eccentric and was prone to outrageous behavior in public. He once described himself as both monarchist and anarchist...he sought order in a world becoming increasingly disordered. Although he once described himself as an Agnostic...he returned to the Roman Catholic Church of his youth toward the end of his life.

Unlike most paintings or icons of the Ascension...Dali's painting has us looking straight up into the sky as Jesus is taken up into heaven...just as the Disciples would have experienced it...up close and personal...not as spectators watching from a distance. The most unusual feature of the painting...Jesus goes back to heaven with dirty bare feet.

Could the Father's much-loved Son return to heaven with dirty bare feet? Yes...and why not! When Jesus returned to heaven he took his humanity back with him...his human body...dirty bare feet and all. Jesus is no longer physically present on earth...he is present in other ways...just as he promised...until the end of time.

Salvador Dali saw the Ascension as the pivotal moment when God and humanity were forever connected in the person of Jesus Christ...the moment when disorder became order. His mission to redeem humankind from sin and death complete, Jesus returned to heaven and as we say in the Creed...now sits down in the place of honor reserved for him...at the Father's right side.

The disciples witnessed the Ascension of Jesus into heaven first-hand, but they did not understand the full implications of what they were seeing. All they knew is that they had seen something that defied explanation. Acts tells us that they stood looking up into the sky, their eyes fixed, unable to fathom what they had just seen. And so the angels brought them more words of assurance...Jesus will come back again just as he was taken up...surrounded by clouds and bright white light.

In the Apostles' Creed we profess to believe in the resurrection of the body...not the continuation of a disembodied spirit. The Ascension of Jesus gives us a preview of our own ascensions into heaven. When that happens...and we don't know when that will be...we will take our own human bodies with us surrounded by clouds and bright white light...we will have resurrected and glorified bodies to be certain...but they will still be our own bodies...bare feet and all...and we will somehow recognize each other.

In the Epistle for the Sunday after the Ascension, Peter has some words of advice on how we can be effective witnesses for Jesus until he comes back. We must be self-controlled, alert, and pray continuously. Our love for each other must be sincere, because love covers over many sins. We must be good managers of the different gifts God has given us. We should always show hospitality toward others. We should pray for peace throughout the world.

While we are still in this time of waiting for Jesus to return...we have a lot of work still left to accomplish...so let's get busy. The Good News is we don't have to go it alone. We have the Holy Helper on our side to help us figure things out...to not become discouraged...and to remain hopeful for that which we have not yet seen.

God goes up to his throne...there are shouts of joy and the blast of trumpets...as the Lord goes up... and there is a place of honor reserved for all who believe in Jesus...and there will be shouts of joy and the blast of trumpets...when we too go up...surrounded by clouds and bright white light.

