

## SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION 2016

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

**ACTS 1.1 LUKE 24.49 | ST. PETER 4.7**

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Jesus has finished his work...just one more thing to accomplish...a short walk with his friends...some words of encouragement...a blessing...and then he left them...but he did not leave them alone and without help.

The disciples must have wondered what was happening as they stood staring up into the sky...their eyes transfixed on the scene...Jesus carried up into heaven surrounded by clouds and bright white light...their last glimpse of Jesus they saw were his bare feet.

Spanish surrealist painter Salvador Dali created hundreds of paintings and other works of art during his lifetime...many have religious themes. He painted *The Ascension of Christ*...the insert in this morning's Order of Service...in 1958...after returning from a period of Agnosticism to the Roman Catholic Church of his youth and embracing a mystical form of Christianity expressed in his paintings.

Dali depicts the Ascension as the disciples would have seen it...not as spectators looking on from a distance but looking straight up into the sky as Jesus is taken up into heaven. We are drawn into the painting by its vibrant colors. The remarkable feature of the painting is Jesus' soiled feet. It is Dali's dramatic acknowledgement of the Incarnation. Jesus walked among us and his feet got dirty. God became a human being like us and walked among us so one day we might walk with him in heaven.

During the reading of the Gospel we re-enacted liturgically the dramatic departure of Jesus back to heaven...we extinguished the Paschal Candle that has been lighted at all Masses since the Easter Vigil. The Paschal Candle goes back into "hiding" until next Easter...but we should not stare at the candle no longer lighted...it does not mean Jesus the Light of the World is no longer present.

When Jesus went back to heaven he took his entire body, bare feet and all, with him. Matthew records the promise Jesus made to all of us...he will come back some day...and take us to where he is in heaven.

The disciples witnessed the Ascension of Jesus into heaven first-hand, but they did not understand what was happening. 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. The Ascension was as mysterious to them as Dali's surrealist painting is to us. But things would become clearer...very soon.

We do have an advantage over the disciples because we know what happened next and why we have no reason to be sad Jesus went back to heaven. Far from it...we should be happy. The Ascension of Jesus gives us a preview of our own ascensions into heaven. We will take our own bodies...resurrected and glorified bodies to be certain...but still our own bodies...bare feet and all...to heaven. And we will somehow recognize each other.

The angels promised we would see Jesus come back one day in the same way he left...surrounded by clouds and bright white light. We are not supposed to know when that will occur. But we are supposed to live our lives as if it were to happen this very moment...and to make certain we are prepared. We get ourselves prepared for the day Jesus comes back by continuing to do his work...using the gifts God has given to each of us for that purpose.

Next Sunday we will celebrate with much enthusiasm the arrival of the greatest gift and most perfect present...the one Jesus himself said he would send our way to help us...the gift we all possess now...God's Holy Spirit. With his help we know we can't just stand by idly staring at the sky waiting for Jesus to return...we need to get busy doing our work.

Peter gives us some practical advice on what we should be doing. 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.

Jesus has finished his work...our work has only just begun...and we are not left alone without help...let's get busy.

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