

SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION 2018

(ASCENSION DAY OBSERVED)

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

ACTS 1.1 LUKE 24.49 1 ST. PETER 4.7

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Will we be wearing shoes when we get to heaven? Jesus apparently didn't need his shoes when he went back to heaven...he left them behind. We probably won't need ours either.

After the Resurrection...Jesus spent time with his disciples getting them ready for his imminent final departure...back to heaven. He walked and talked with them...he reassured them he wouldn't leave them without help...he even made lunch for them.

When it was time for him to leave...he took the disciples a short distance outside of the city...he had a few parting words to give them...he gave them a blessing...and then he was taken up into heaven...swallowed up by a cloud. The last glimpse the disciples had of Jesus was his bare unwashed feet.

What Jesus didn't leave behind was his human body. Jesus rose from the dead on Easter and still had a human body...he was not a ghost. Ghosts don't have lunch with friends...Jesus had lunch with his friends. We state in the Apostles' Creed our firm belief in the resurrection of the body.

Spanish surrealist painter Salvador Dali's painting *Ascension of Christ* invites us to experience the Ascension as the disciples would have experienced it...from their vantage point. We don't see the disciples...only Jesus and his bare unwashed feet being taken up into heaven.

Dali's painting...which we will explore in more detail in this morning's Discussion Group...is compellingly Incarnational. Jesus...the Second Person of the Trinity...did not go back to heaven as a disembodied spirit...he took his human body with him.

When Jesus returns to take us to heaven...we will not exist for all eternity as disembodied spirits either...we will take our human bodies to heaven with us...but they will be transformed and perfected beyond anything we can imagine. We probably won't need shoes either...and our feet will no doubt be washed and clean.

The Paschal Candle, which was lit at the Easter Vigil and has burned at all Masses since then, symbolizes Jesus' Resurrection and the time he spent with his disciples until the Ascension. During the reading of this morning's Gospel, the Paschal Candle was extinguished...symbolizing Jesus' return to heaven.

Acts tells us after Jesus was taken up into heaven, the disciples stood looking up into the sky, their eyes fixed, unable to comprehend what just happened. They were still hoping Jesus was another King David...they didn't yet understand the work Jesus had for them.

Saint Luke tells us the reason he wrote his Gospel was to relate everything Jesus did from the time he began his work to redeem mankind...until the moment he was taken up into heaven. The positive proof Jesus was alive during this time was the walking, talking and eating he shared with his friends.

Jesus' work continues in and through us...and like the disciples...we shouldn't stand staring at the sky wondering what was next...we should get busy. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit...we have a mission and it is the one Peter describes in the Epistle for the Sunday after Ascension.

Each of us, Peter writes, is to act as if Jesus were to return at this very moment. We are to pray, love one another, show hospitality and not complain. We are to be good stewards of the good and perfect gifts God has given us. This is what we are to do, Peter writes, until Jesus returns.

We get ourselves ready for Jesus' return by committing ourselves to continuing the work he has already begun in each of us. We can't be idle...we have to stay busy.

What about our shoes? We'll have to keep wearing them for now. When we get to heaven we won't need them. But if there is such a thing as heavenly footwear...they will fit perfectly...to go along with our resurrected, ascended and perfected bodies.

Now that's something to look forward to!

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