

SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION 2019

(ASCENSION DAY OBSERVED)

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

ACTS 1.1 LUKE 24.49 1 PETER 4.7

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“What just happened”...the disciples asked themselves as they stood staring up into the sky. Jesus told them earlier he was going to have to leave them. Is this what he meant? What next?

Saint Luke tells us Jesus and his disciples took a walk to Bethany...a small town about two miles from Jerusalem. Bethany is on the east slope of the Mount of Olives...the site of the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus and his disciples took many walks. He talked with them and taught them and they witnessed his miracles. This walk was different...it would be the last he would take with them before returning to his father in heaven. It was time for him to say ‘good-bye’...for a while.

Jesus tells his disciples not to worry...they would soon be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit...everything would be made clear to them. They would be his witnesses to the whole world.

Then while he was blessing them, he was suddenly taken up into heaven surrounded by a bright white cloud. The last glimpse of Jesus the disciples saw was his bare dirty feet. He left his shoes behind...perhaps he didn’t need shoes in heaven.

We just acted out liturgically Jesus’ sudden departure by extinguishing the Paschal Candle at the conclusion of the Gospel. Jesus the Light of the World has gone back to heaven...but he has not left us alone...he has not left us in the dark. He tells us to remember everything he has taught us...and he will be with us until the end of time.

When Jesus was crucified he felt all the pain and hurt any human being would have felt. When he rose from the dead on Easter Day he wasn’t an apparition...he rose in a human body. People could touch him...he even made lunch for his friends. When he went back to heaven he took his human body with him...dirty feet and all. That tells us something about what our own resurrections and ascensions will be like...our human will

get raised and we will take them to heaven with us...we won't leave them behind.

We often talk about Salvador Dali’s surreal painting *Ascension of Christ*. The striking feature of the painting is the view we have of the Ascension...not as spectators from a distance...but looking straight up at Jesus taken up into a bright white cloud...dirty feet and all. We become witnesses to the Ascension...up close and personal!

Why did Dali and why should we focus on Jesus’ dirty feet? It is compellingly *Incarnational!* The word *incarnation* comes from the Latin verb *incarno...to be made flesh*. We believe in a God who became a flesh and blood human male...he walked among us so one day we might walk with him in heaven. Human beings have dirty feet...ghosts don’t.

The Ascension is the beginning of the end of times Jesus told his disciples would last for a little while. At some point in the future everything we are familiar with will no longer exist. We shouldn’t fear the end times...because we know what’s next. For now...our mission is to be active participants in the event called the end of the world...by being effective witnesses for Jesus.

In the Epistle for the Sunday after Ascension, Peter gives us some solid, practical advice on how to do that...we must be self-controlled, we must stay alert...and we must pray continuously. Our love for each other must be sincere...because love covers many sins. We must show hospitality toward each other.

We’re not alone in doing our work. We have the special gift of the Holy Spirit...God’s Holy Helper...to show us how to be good witnesses for Jesus...today and every day. Finally...we should to live our lives as if Jesus was to return right now...this very minute...in this very place.

What’s next for us? We don’t need to stand staring up at the sky. Our mission to spread the Good News about Jesus has really just begun. When Jesus returns we want to be ready for him. He will take us back to heaven with him...dirty feet and all...and he will say to each of us, “Well done my friend. Mission accomplished!”

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