

Sunday after Ascension 2020
(Ascension Day Observed)
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
Acts 1.1 Luke 24.49 / St. Peter 4.7

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“You are witnesses of these things”, Jesus said to his disciples. It was time for him to leave them...he promised them he would send the Helper...they would not be left alone. Just a few more words of assurance and a blessing ...the last glimpse of Jesus the disciples saw was the bottom of his bare feet being taken up into a cloud surrounded by bright white light.

During his last few days with his disciples before the Ascension, Jesus kept telling them he was going to be leaving them again...he was going back to his Father who had sent him. They did not understand what he meant by all of this talk about going back to the Father. They could not possibly have understood what he meant when he then told them his going away was for their own good. It was for our good too he went back to heaven.

We experience in some way what the disciples must have experienced through our liturgical reenactment of Jesus' final departure from Earth in his resurrected and glorified body and his return to the Father. After the reading of the Gospel...the Paschal Candle that was lit on Easter morning and has burned bright at every Mass throughout the Easter Season was extinguished.

The Paschal Candle is the first candle lit on Easter morning and all other candles are lit from it. Its flame represents the risen Christ...the Light of the World...bringing light (life)...overcoming darkness (death) of the world without God...through extinguishing candles and lights at the Maundy Thursday Liturgy. But as we say hear in the Last Gospel...the Light shining in darkness can never be put out.

Jesus returned to the Father and took his entire body, bare feet and all, with him. It is a profound proof of the Incarnation...Jesus didn't discard his human body when he went back to heaven...he took it with him. So will we. We state our firm belief in this truth in the Apostles' Creed...we believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

Jesus told his disciples not to be discouraged because he was leaving. While we may not be able to physically see Jesus at this very moment, Matthew records his promise to the disciples he would always be with them. He is also with us...until the end of time...until he comes back. And he will come back...according to God's own timetable and not ours!

The disciples witnessed the Ascension of Jesus into heaven first-hand, but they could not have understood at that time what it was all about. 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. But things would be made clear to them soon.

Angels promised the disciples we would see Jesus come back one day in the same way he left...surrounded by white clouds and bright 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 will come back by continuing to do his work...using the gifts God has given to each of us for that purpose. We too are his disciples and witnesses.

In the Epistle for the Sunday after the Ascension, Peter gives us some practical 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.

Our prayer is that Jesus will hurry up and come back. We look forward with hope and expectation to that day. In the meantime, we should not just stare up at the sky and wait for something to happen. We have work to do and God has given us the help we need to accomplish his work.

Let's get busy! We do have help! We're not alone!

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