

Sunday after Ascension 2022

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

*1 St. Peter 4.7-11 St. John 15.26-27 & 16.1-4*

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It's time for Jesus to say "good-bye"...for now...with the promise we will see him again. Jesus always keeps his promises.

Jesus began preparing his disciples for his return to the Father at the Last Supper. He told them they would be sad but the world will be glad. He also told them their sadness wouldn't last. He would send them the Holy Spirit who would make everything clear to them. They would be his witnesses in every part of the world.

In the days before his final departure, Jesus did what he always did with them...he taught them and filled them with hope and another promise...he would always be with them...the same promise he has given us. But it was now time for him to leave His final good-bye wave was a blessing of unconditional love.

During the reading of the Gospel at our Ascension Day Mass, we acted out liturgically what the disciples saw for themselves on the hill outside Jerusalem 2000 years ago. We extinguished the Paschal Candle that was first lighted at the Easter Vigil when we sang the words "the Light of Christ".

The Paschal Candle is also lighted at baptisms and funerals...the bookends of our lives in the Church here on earth. The Paschal Candle may have been extinguished...but Jesus who is the Light of the World is present with us even now...his Light can never be put out.

Before he went back to heaven the disciples asked Jesus if he was now going to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies and restore the Kingdom of Israel. They still expected him to be a second David and lead them in a revolt against the Romans occupation. They didn't fully understand what Jesus meant by "His Kingdom".

Jesus doesn't answer the disciples directly. He tells them not to concern themselves with things over which they have no control. God the Father has his own schedule for working things out. It's an exercise in futility for us to try to figure out God's timetable for Jesus' return.

The angels promised the disciples they would see Jesus return one day, and it is always our hope and prayer that Jesus will return soon. Jesus's Ascension Day message to us is that we have a mission to be his witnesses today, tomorrow and next week...while wait for Jesus to return.

Peter offers us some practical advice about our mission in the Epistle for the Sunday after the Ascension: We must be self-controlled, alert to be able to pray. Our love for each other must be sincere, because love covers many sins. We should always show hospitality toward others without complaining. We must be good stewards of the special gifts we receive from God for the good of others.

The Ascension of Jesus into heaven presented a real challenge for the disciples. They stood in awe and disbelief as they watched Jesus go back to heaven. Saint Luke writes, "...their eyes were fixed on the sky". They needed the power of the Holy Spirit to transform their lives and to make it clear their mission was just starting.

Ascension Day also presents a challenge for us not to forget what the Paschal Candle symbolizes. We share in the disciples' mission. Their mission was to take Jesus, the Light of the World, to everyone...to every corner of the world...that is our mission too.

We should also be praying for peace throughout the world; we should be asking God for healing of body and soul; we should welcome and show hospitality toward others; and in everything we do we must show love.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us the Holy Spirit will give us the wisdom and strength to withstand ridicule from forces inside and outside the Church. We have already heard Jesus tells us to expect these things...and be brave...because he has defeated the world.

Jesus said "good-bye"...for now. We will see him again...and Jesus always keeps his promises. Let us pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to transform our lives and to guide us and help us do our mission well.

Our work has just begun!

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