

Ascension - C
Acts 1:1-11;
Ephesians 1:17-23;
Luke 24:46-53
Little Flower - 5/12/13

My Brothers and Sisters,

The parish staff and I want to wish all mothers a very happy Mothers' Day. One of the distinguishing qualities of good mothers is their willingness to sacrifice for their children. Today, however, is your day. Please enjoy!

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord. Today we celebrate Jesus' return to his Father and his entrance into glory.

According to Acts, "*as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight.*" In some ways, the pre-Vatican II Liturgy was more visual, more dramatic, than today's Liturgy. In the pre-Vatican II Liturgy, after the priest finished the Ascension Thursday Gospel, the altar server extinguished the Paschal Candle, accentuating Jesus' physical separation from the world.

The reading from Ephesians spells out the significance of Jesus' entrance into glory. God seated him at his right hand, "*and he put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body...*" Also, Jesus told his disciples at the Last Supper that when he returned to the Father, he would be empowered to send the Holy Spirit.

However, the part of the Ascension reading I have always liked best was the image of the disciples staring up at the sky watching Jesus disappear from their sight. Acts tells us that two angels challenged them: "*Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky?*" In effect, the angels were reminding them that Church was now in their hands. Prior to his Ascension, Jesus had charged them to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, witnesses to his death and resurrection, and to call everyone to repentance and conversion for the forgiveness of sins. Likewise, in his final instructions, he also promised to send the Holy Spirit upon them, thus promising to be with them in his Spirit.

Today the Church is in our hands, at least the Church in this small part of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. The Holy Spirit is now within and among us. In Acts, Jesus promised, "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses...*" We need to take these words of Jesus seriously. In other words, we, the parishioners of Little Flower parish, have been empowered and charged to be Jesus' witnesses in and to the world today, witnesses to the power of his death and resurrection, and to call one another and others to repentance and conversion for the forgiveness of sins.

The temptation of churches and parishes is to become too focused on ourselves and meeting our own needs. Prior to his election, Pope Francis told the Cardinals that "when the Church does not come out of herself to evangelize, she becomes self-referential and then gets sick."¹ Such a church becomes worldly, which he defines as "living within herself, of herself, for herself."

What kind of parish are we? What kind of parish do we want to be? Pope Francis believes "the Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries..." If we really want to respond to Jesus' charge in the Gospel, we need to focus on evangelization and re-evangelization and serving those on the peripheries, those in need.

My brothers and sisters, during the days between Ascension and Pentecost, the Church asks us to pray for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church and the world. I would encourage us to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit on what we, Little Flower parish, need to do to better come out of ourselves to witness to Jesus' death and resurrection and invite people to conversion.

¹Quotations from Pope Francis in this homily come from "Bergoglio's Intervention: A diagnosis of the problems in the Church," Vatican Radio Print Service, 3/27/2013, 12:38:22 PM.