

Ascension - C
Acts 1:1-11;
Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:19-23;
Luke 24:46-53
Little Flower - 6/2/19

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension.

According to today's reading from Acts, Jesus ascended into heaven forty days after his resurrection. Those of us who are older remember when we celebrated Ascension Thursday as a Holyday of Obligation. Ascension Thursday was forty days after Easter. The Church offered the option of moving the celebration of Ascension to the following Sunday because Jesus' Ascension is an integral part of the Christ's paschal mystery. The Church wanted as many people as possible to celebrate this feast. Also, those of us who are older remember that the Easter candle was extinguished immediately after the Gospel on Ascension Thursday to remind us that Jesus was no longer present as he had been after Easter. Today we extinguish the Easter candle after the last Mass on Pentecost, which marks the end of the Easter Season.

When we celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension, it is important that we reflect on the significance of his Ascension. When Jesus ascended into heaven, he was seated at God's right hand in glory and empowered to send the Holy Spirit. From his seat at God's right hand, Jesus will return in glory to judge the living and the dead.

In today's reading from Acts, we are told that Jesus disciples were looking intently at the sky as Jesus was ascending when two angels appeared and said to them, "*Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven.*" In effect, the angels told the apostles that they could not be stargazers. The Church was now in their hands. Today the Church is in our hands.

In every age, the Church has to adapt to changing situations and changing needs. I would suggest that the Church is at a crossroads right now.

- The Church has been seriously wounded by all the scandals of this past year. What do you think the Church should do to recover from these wounds?
- Especially in the West, church attendance has dropped precipitously. Not only are Catholics not practicing their faith, many of them no longer believe. In our society, what would you do to effectively evangelize and re-evangelize?
- We all know there is a critical shortage of priests in our Archdiocese. If you read the list of clergy changes in *The Criterion*, there are approximately 30 changes, including five retirements. Several additional parishes will share a pastor. If you were a bishop, how would you decide which parishes to close or merge or share a pastor?
- The Church universal is going to have to struggle with who can be priests. Do you think the Church should allow all priests to be married? Should there be women deacons?
- As the income of parishes remains flat or decreases, how would you decide what the parish priorities should be?

These are just some of the decisions that the Pope, bishops, and pastors with their parishes will have to make because the Church is in our hands. At the same time, Jesus promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide the Church. We have to trust that the Spirit will always be with us, but we have to be open to the working of the Spirit within us and within the Church. Therefore, the Church encourages us to pray during this week for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon us and the Church as we prepare to celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost next week.

My brothers and sisters, in these challenging times, the words of Fr. Aelred Cody are more relevant than ever: "Among the constant, necessary concerns of all committed members of the Church is that of remaining faithful to our origins and to the purpose for which we exist, while adapting ourselves institutionally and individually to the requirements of our own times."