

Ascension - C  
Acts 1:1-11;  
Ephesians 1:17-23;  
Luke 24:46-53  
Little Flower - 5/29/22

My Brothers and Sisters,

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

Last Sunday at coffee and donuts I was amazed when one of our first graders asked me what is "the mystery of faith." In my first years as a priest, a high school girl asked me the same question. Great question, especially from a first grader!

At every Mass, after the consecration, you proclaim the mystery of faith: "We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again." or "When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again," or "Save us, Savior of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free." The mystery of faith is "the entire mystery of salvation through Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, which is made present in the celebration of the Eucharist." In today's reading from Ephesians, St. Paul wrote that after raising Jesus from the dead, God glorified him by seating him at his right hand in the heavens, putting all things beneath his feet and making him head of the church, his body.

Today's reading from Acts gives the most detailed description of the Ascension. After giving them his final instructions, as they were looking on, Jesus "*was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight.*" The visual of him going up into the heavens and being taken from their sight makes it easier for us to understand both Jesus' glorification at the right hand of God and his physical separation from the world. 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.

However, equally importantly, as the apostles watched Jesus ascend into the clouds, two angels appeared and said, "*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.*" The angels were telling the apostles that they could not passively await his return. The angels were telling them that Jesus was now entrusting the Church to them. They were now responsible for continuing his mission and ministry in the world.

Today Jesus entrusts the church and, more specifically, this parish to us. I would suggest that we are challenged not to be passive Catholics. For example, in the past, Catholic parishes did not need to reach out. When Catholics moved into a neighborhood, they joined the neighborhood Catholic parish. This is no longer necessarily true. We have to reach out to new neighbors and welcome them to the neighborhood and, if they are Catholic, invite them to come to Little Flower. Second, if Little Flower has an urgent need today, we need more of our parishioners to be engaged in the parish. Engagement starts with consistent attendance at Sunday Eucharist. Also, we need everyone to take ownership for the parish. Everyone young and old needs to be willing to engage in some ministry or volunteer opportunity. For example, in some areas, the festival is struggling to find volunteers. Finally, everyone needs to do his or her best to financially support our parish. Parishes cannot thrive without high engagement from parishioners. The key word is *engagement*.

My brothers and sisters, immediately before his Ascension, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit upon his disciples to empower them to be witnesses to the mystery of faith: "*Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*" He has sent his Holy Spirit upon us. The Holy Spirit has empowered us to be witnesses to the mystery of faith.