

MISSION, PROMISE AND HOPE

This feast of the Ascension celebrates both a mission and a promise. The mission Jesus gives to the apostles & the Church is to continue his work. The gospel says that Jesus continued to work through the disciples and that he worked with them. But that work isn't over. He continues to work through us and with us.

The promise is that we will not have to do this work by ourselves. We don't have to be the source of this work, but only be the instruments through whom Jesus will work. We're to be instruments of the Holy Spirit. At the Ascension, Jesus makes a promise and at Pentecost that promise is fulfilled.

This feast tells us something both about Jesus and about ourselves. About Jesus, that he has completed his mission, he ascends to the Father in glory. His work in his living human body is complete and now he works through the living body of his Church. His visible presence continues now in the sacraments. So while absent, Jesus remains present. He does not leave us but merely leaves in human form. Jesus remained united to the Father when he came to earth and now even though he returns to the Father, he remains here with us.

Since Ash Wednesday we have been pondering different aspects of the Paschal Mystery Jesus' temptation, transfiguration and most importantly, his passion, death and resurrection. This all finds its fulfillment in glorification, the glorification of Jesus. And that leads us to what this feast says about ourselves.

Jesus is taken from their sight and yet he takes something with him when he goes and that is the humanity he shares with us. And now at the right hand of the Father, above the angels is Jesus truly divine but truly human. Reigning in the glory of heaven is a glorified and yet human body. It has been said that in Christ, the humanity we share has entered into the inner life of God in a new and unheard of way. We go to heaven to the extent we go to Jesus and the more firmly we're grounded in Jesus the more deeply we move into heaven.

We go to Jesus by opening our hearts to his love, by reading and embracing his Word, by faithfully living the Christ in the ordinariness of our daily life and seeing him among others, by prayer and by worthily sharing in and living the sacraments. In his humanity Jesus remains here with us and by that humanity we are in one sense already in heaven. The Ascension reminds us that we're to share that life of God.

This feast is also an invitation to hope. Although we no longer see Jesus in his human body, we continue to believe through the vision of faith, enlightened by hope.

This feast can seem bittersweet and yet it's steeped in hope. Jesus passes out of visible sight but the apostles don't despair, they don't scatter. Instead, they return to Jerusalem, they remain united and persevere in prayer. Jesus ascends not to abandon us but to call us to hope.

Here in the Eucharist our hope is renewed. We're reminded of who Jesus is and of his work. We don't just remember what happened, sacramentally we share in that reality. We're reminded of who we are and what our work and what our mission is. Here we share in the bread of hope and the cup of hope. Here we go forward with lives of intentional faith as a people on a mission, with a promise through hope. This is the hope that flows from the dying, rising and ascending of Jesus. We remember that we too are to share in that dying, rising and ascending to the heights of God's love.