

Ascension of the Lord (Acts 1:1-11; Eph 1:17-23; Mt 28:16-20) **21 May 2023**

This week's readings offer three different glimpses into the singular event that we know as the Ascension of our Lord. In the first reading, the writer Luke provides the classic depiction of the Apostles staring intently at the clouds as the Savior is lifted up and departs from them. We're given the impression that they are confused or in disbelief as the angels ask them why they are standing around looking at the sky. It is as if they are paralyzed by the uncertainty of what's next.

Then Paul's letter to the Ephesians affirms for us the destination of the Ascended Lord as he takes his place at the right hand of the Father in heaven. A seat above every principality, authority, power and dominion. And yet, I would guess that his coronation wasn't nearly as grand as this past week's coronation of King Charles of England. In ascending upon his throne, Jesus doesn't expect pomp and pageantry but he does ask that we believe. I think we can all agree that it would be easier to believe if only apostles would have video recorded his ascension by some means.

And finally, Matthew's gospel shares our Lord's departing words, now known as the great commissioning: "Go make disciples of all nations." A task beyond the capability of any eleven human beings. Perhaps that's why the passage says that they doubted. Perhaps they doubted what they had just witnessed, but they most certainly would have doubted their ability to go and share the good news to the whole world. Fortunately, for our God, all things are possible - even Fr. Rick surviving 40 years of priestly service.

In a few moments we will profess our Creed. And each of us will declare that we believe that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate, suffered death, was buried and rose for our sake. And we will acclaim that he ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. If we believe in Jesus' Passion, Resurrection

and Ascension, then we must also believe that we have been called to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. A universal community of believers commissioned to make disciples of all nations. Still no easier for us than it was for those first apostles. But fortunately for us, Jesus remains with us, helping us to do what no human being, or collection of humans could possibly accomplish on their own. Admittedly, Jesus is no longer with us in his visible and physical human form, but as he promised, he has not left us orphaned and better still, he has shown us the way.

Jesus didn't abandon us when he ascended. He is Our Father who art in heaven. But, in his trinitarian self, he remains with us and he joins us physically at every Mass in the consecration of the Eucharist. And through his Spirit, he continues to guide our hearts on the path of righteousness. Consequently, instead of focusing our attention in the clouds and simply waiting for his second coming, we are called to look down and search for his footprints. We are challenged to follow the path that he has blazed for us and we are called to walk in his footsteps.

So much of the Easter Season, which will end next week with our celebration of Pentecost, is focused on Jesus' sacrificial gift of salvation given to us on the cross. It is impossible to overstate the importance of the events of Good Friday and the Resurrection of Easter Sunday. His death and resurrection secured our forgiveness, reconciled us with God and opened the gates of heaven to us. But our Savior's story didn't end with his resurrection. Jesus did not rise and then abandon us. He did not leave us to fend for ourselves until he returns. He ascended but never left us. Now, from his heavenly throne, he continues to answer our prayers and he continues to intercede for us. Better still, on Pentecost, we learn that he will bless all those who believe with his Holy Spirit.