

Homily. The Ascension of the Lord. Year. C. 1/2 June 2019.

It sounds as though Jesus took off like a rocket ship into space, especially when we hear that a cloud took Him from their sight leaving the disciples staring blankly into the sky. The Ascension of the Lord, however, isn't about a space trip. It's about creating a space within us so that God can be present with us and through us to everyone, everywhere.

Think about it for a moment; If Jesus hadn't gone from our sight and made His way back to God where would we have fitted in? Every time that someone was sick or hungry, lonely or sad, searching for the truth or needing to experience the Good-News of compassion, acceptance and forgiveness, what would have happened is that we'd have quickly referred them to Jesus and then sat on our hands. We'd have remained disciples, eternal spectators, expecting Jesus to do it all for us. We'd have been His servants, yes, but we'd never have had the chance He promised us to become His friends, His co-workers and Apostles, His living presence and Body here on this earth, in our time and for all times and places.

Jesus Ascension is about giving us this opportunity of grace. The end of His physical presence with us created the space needed for a greater gift; the coming upon us of the Power from on High, our clothing with His living presence. No longer is Jesus to be limited to the times and culture of 2000 years ago or to the regions of Jerusalem, Judaea and Samaria. Now He walks with us wherever we go. He can speak and act through us and be as relevant and real to others as we are today.

Several times the readings tell us that the Ascension of the Lord only makes sense if the space of His absence in one form is filled with His presence in another, filled by His Holy Spirit. That's why tonight's/today's Solemnity is always followed by next weekend's celebration of Pentecost. They are two inseparable movements of the one Divine action. As St. Paul puts it to us; Jesus is now seated forever at God's right hand and everything has been subjected to Him who rules over all. The Lord now reigns as the head of His Body, the Church, the very fullness of Him who fills the whole of creation. I don't know whether you noticed, but that's you and me that St. Paul's talking about. We've become Jesus friends and Apostles, His eyes and ears, arms and legs, voice and heart. We've become vital parts of His own living Body, as friendly and vital to Him as these faculties are to our own bodies.

So, no, this isn't about Jesus departure from this planet, His lifting off into the clouds never to be seen again. Instead, it's the room needed so we can be gifted by His new and better way of being present and near. This space opens up for all of us a future that's now no more limited than is that of Jesus Himself. For this grace of space giving us our baptism into the Lord's Spirit we joyfully celebrate and give thanks here, praying and asking God's to clothe us more richly with His presence and His Power from on high.