

Homily - Feast of the Ascension 2024

The Ascension of the Lord took place 40 days after the resurrection. In Canada, we celebrate this event on the Sunday following Ascension Thursday, the fortieth day of the Easter season. This leads me to the question: What does the Ascension of the Lord teach us this year?

Leonardo da Vinci had started to work on a large canvas in his studio. For a while he worked at it – choosing the subject, planning the perspective, sketching the outline, applying the colours, with his own inimitable genius. Then suddenly he stopped working on it. Summoning one of his talented students, the master invited him to complete the work. The horrified student protested that he was both unworthy and unable to complete the great painting, which his master had begun. But da Vinci silenced him. “Will not what I have done inspire you to do your best?” — Jesus our Master began to spread the Good News two thousand years ago by what he said and did and, supremely, by what he suffered. He illustrated his message and he has left us to finish the picture. Will his life not inspire us to finish the picture? This is the message of the Ascension. (John Rose in John’s Sunday Homilies). (<https://frtonyshomilies.com/>).

In years past, when reflecting on the meaning of the Ascension of Jesus, I have usually found myself considering one word: “GO!” The meaning of the Ascension rooted in Jesus’ last words before going home to heaven. My own spiritual experience of the Ascension is rooted in being sent as a priest to serve the People of God. The message to witness to the gospel according to the vocation we have received is true for all of us.

Today I would like to consider the Ascension from another perspective, that of considering the question: What became possible because of Jesus’ Ascension? To answer this, let us recall words were recently heard from John’s gospel: “I am going to prepare a place for you, so that where I am, you may be too.” When

Jesus ascends into heaven, he prepares a place for each of us, something he promised his disciples, shortly before he was crucified. So there are at least two parts to the Ascension, what Jesus asks of his disciples and what Jesus promises to do for his disciples. His return we will discuss another day.

Letting go. Parents who watch their children leave home know something about the heartfelt challenge of letting them go.

Lauren Cormier, a mom, tells this story. “Last week my son told me that his friends teased him because of the notes I put in his lunchbox. I said I would stop writing them if he wanted me to. He told me I could continue, but I could see the struggle in his eyes; the struggle between not wanting to hurt my feelings and becoming more independent. We came up with a solution to the note problem that satisfies us both for now, but I know what’s coming. Maybe it’ll be the lunchbox notes, maybe it’ll be our bedtime cuddles, maybe it’ll be something else entirely. He’ll struggle for days between hurting my feelings and being true to what he is meant to do: Grow up and away. Until finally, he’ll bare his heart. And I will take it well. I’ll understand. But I will cry later. Oh, how I’ll cry.”

The Feast of the Ascension reminds us that there is a time for everything and there is no growth without letting go. The disciples stood and looked up, we are not told how long they remained.. Some probably stayed there for quite a while. Maybe they cried. Eventually they left and did what Jesus had asked of them. And because Jesus left, each person has a place waiting for them in the Father’s house. To use an Easter word; Alleluia!

Until we are called home our attention should be given to the words of St. Paul in the second reading.

“I ... urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.”

We are given the gifts we have to go love and serve the Lord and one another. So let us not stand looking up to heaven wondering what has happened. If we are honest with ourselves, we will likely cry from time to time, or at least feel like it.. But let us live confidently as disciples of the Lord, living his ways on earth until we are called to our dwelling place in Heaven. What a wonderful feast we celebrate today. Jesus has gone to prepare a plan for us and entrusts us with a mission until he calls us home. Thanks be to God!