

The Holy Spirit Province

NEWSLETTER

25/05/22



MAKING SENSE OF THE ASCENSION OF JESUS

Acts 1:1-11; Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:19-23; Luke 24:46-53

In our Creed today we will be saying of Jesus: 'He ascended into heaven.' What picture comes to mind when we think of Jesus ascending into heaven? Do we picture him going far away to outer space like a spaceship at Cape Canaveral? If we do, we show that we don't realize that the words of scripture about this are not to be taken literally. They are a poetic way of saying that Jesus is no longer on earth in a fleshly, physical and material way. The words of scripture mean that he has gone to God in his risen body and lives with God in light and glory. What they mean is that God who raised him from the dead has therefore affirmed, honoured and exalted him.

Does his being with God mean he is no longer with us? No! He is with us more strongly, more powerfully than when he walked the lanes, streets, and roads, of Palestine. He is present to us in spirit, i.e., in his gift to us of the Holy Spirit, his other-self. He acts on us in all the ways the Spirit influences us.

So, we don't go looking for him on the clouds or in the sky but in all the down-to-earth ways in which he told us we would find him? We find him in our reading, hearing and heeding of the scriptures, which speak of him. We find him in our celebration of the sacraments. Each of the seven sacraments is a sign of his presence and action. This is especially true of the Eucharist, which is specifically the sign and presence to us of his now glorified and spiritualized body. We find him in our concern and care for our neighbours, and especially for our fellow human beings who are poor, neglected, sad, sorrowing, confused, afraid, or despairing.

But if Jesus is no longer visible in the old familiar ways, how will people come to know of his presence? The answer is that he wants to make himself present through his disciples. So, on this Feast of the Ascension, we also remember the mission he gave his followers, you and me included before he went home to God. This is to go and tell everyone everywhere the good news that Jesus is alive, and that he is our Saviour, the one who changes people for the better through his gift of the Holy Spirit. So, before he disappears, he says to his

followers of every century, including our 21st:” You are my witnesses,” and that to witness to him, we will be “clothed with the power from on high,” the power that is the Holy Spirit.

On the subject of witnessing, it’s worth remembering that Pope Paul VI said that “the world needs witnesses more than it needs teachers.” In fact, the world is full of both true and false teachers but has far fewer witnesses, i.e., people who speak with their lives. Between the two roles, there is the same difference that exists between saying and doing. A well-known proverb underlines this difference: “Actions speak louder than words,” more recently put by the rappers as, “Walk the walk, not just talk the talk.”

Being witnesses to Jesus is a very important role for parents of children, especially when they are asked to help with the teaching of their children getting ready for First Reconciliation, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation. The words which parents say about meeting Jesus and belonging to the Church in each of these steps will mean nothing if the parents don’t practise what they preach. What will the children think if their parents don’t go to Mass on Sunday, don’t ever make the sign of the cross with them, and don’t ever pray with them? The souls of children are like sheets of photographic film. Everything they see and hear in their childhood years leaves a trace, an imprint. One day the “film” will be “developed” and it will have its effects, good or bad.

So, in summary, in ascending to heaven, Jesus has not left us. He has merely disappeared from our sight. This is similar to what happens in the Eucharist. So long as the host is outside us, we see it, we adore it. After receiving the host that is Jesus, we no longer see it. It has disappeared, but it has disappeared so that Jesus can be within us, and so that he can be present to us in a new and even more powerful way than when he walked our earth in the flesh. So, like the first disciples, we are not sad that Jesus has disappeared but glad, because he is still with us and still loving us in so many ways.

At our Eucharist today, then, let’s make a point of thanking God with joy, that Jesus is not only risen and exalted into glory with God but that he is also still with us, in many powerful and loving ways, through his gift of his Spirit, his alter ego, his second-self!

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