

Feast of the Ascension May 24, 2009

Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 4:1-13; Mark 16:15-20

Faith: Not Knowing What To Expect

Today is the Feast of the Ascension. The Ascension set up a time of great anticipation for Jesus' disciples. We can sit back now and know what is going to happen next; that next week we will celebrate the even greater Feast of Pentecost. But, as Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples weren't real sure what was going to happen next. They had followed Jesus and been there as He performed great miracles. They thought He would become an earthly ruler, but then, when he suffered and was crucified, they cowered in fear in the upper room. But again Jesus gave them hope as He appeared to them for forty days after He rose from the dead. They asked Him, as we heard in our first reading this morning: "**Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?**" Imagine their disappointment and confusion when Jesus told His disciples that instead He must return to His Father.

We hear in the Gospel of John: "**Jesus said to his disciples: 'Now I am going to the one who sent me, and not one of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I told you this, grief has filled your hearts. But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.'**" (John 16:5-7) We can try to put ourselves in the place of the disciples and try to make sense of these words of Jesus.

It was better for the disciples, it is better for us, that Jesus returned to the Father so that He could send us His Spirit to be our Advocate. The disciples weren't sure what Jesus meant, but they waited patiently as they were instructed. We now know what Jesus meant, but how often do we take His message and promise and gift of the Spirit for granted? For the last six weeks we have celebrated Christ's Resurrection; His victory over death that offers us such great hope for our futures. But how often do we take that message and gift for granted, as well?

We can get so caught up in this busy season of spring, enjoying the warm weather and our holiday weekend, and getting busy with our spring cleaning and gardening and planning for graduations. We have so much going on in our lives at this time of year that it is easy to lose track of the great mysteries that the Church is celebrating. It's hard for us to imagine 2000 years ago and how the disciples were living day by day, not knowing what the next day would bring, trusting in faith in Christ. And Jesus promised that they would be rewarded for their faith. We hear Jesus in this morning's gospel: "**These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents with their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.**" And as we heard in our second reading, we will all receive different gifts of the Spirit. How strong is our faith and trust to receive the gifts entrusted to us and use in confidence?

Next week we celebrate Pentecost which is referred to as the birthday of the Church. For the disciples 2000 years ago, that first birthday was very much a surprise party as the

Holy Spirit came in upon them suddenly as a great wind and tongues of fire appeared on their heads. Let us spend this next week preparing to celebrate the Church's birthday. It is not a surprise party for us. Let us take this last week of the Church's Easter Season and celebrate all that God has done for us through His Son, Jesus Christ. Let us not take it for granted. Let us prepare our hearts and souls to be open to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit and use them for the good of the Church.

Let us not be so busy with the things of this world that we become distracted from the things of heaven which are so much more important. We do not know when it will be our time to leave this earth and move on to the next. It is not for us to know the times and the seasons that the Father has established. We can look back and see the events of the Ascension and of Pentecost as history. We can read that history in scripture and in this way we have an advantage over the disciples who lived these events in real time. But just like the disciples, we still live day by day not knowing what to expect next; when Jesus will come again, when He will come for us. And all we can do is what the disciples did, and that is to live each day trusting in faith in the love of Christ. It is our faith and trust in Christ that will get us through our daily struggles, through our confusion and ignorance, through the ups and downs of everyday life. Like the disciples, we trust that everything will be okay even though we are not sure what will happen next in our lives.

Deacon Joe Hulway