

## Ascension – Cycle A May 4, 2008

Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23; Matthew 28:16-20

### The Teacher's Spirit

If you came to church early, and have already looked through your bulletin, then you know the rumor is true; I am retiring. I just want to clear up any confusion there may be, because someone stopped me this past week thinking that I was retiring from being a deacon. I am not retiring as a deacon. Since it is an unpaid ministry, deacons don't really retire. When we get older, however, we can move to senior status and reduce our active ministry. But for now, as far as I know, I will be continuing my assignment here at Sacred Heart at least through June of 2009. But I have retired, effective last Wednesday, from my engineering position at General Motors after almost 35 years of service.

In reality, I don't plan to retire; I consider it more of a career transition. There are a few things that I want to finish up over the next six months or so, and then I'm going to let God lead me to what I'm supposed to do next. One of the things I've considered is going into teaching, but I'm not sure I have the patience for that. I've spent more hours sitting in classrooms than I care to remember. And I've seen good teachers work hard to explain their course material, and then when they ask a simple question of their students to test their comprehension, they get the old deer-in-the-headlights response. Or, there's the student who asks a question that makes it evident that he hasn't grasped the point of the lecture. The frustration on the face of the teachers is apparent; they have taught, but the students have not learned.

Yesterday was St. Philip's feast day, and our gospel story at Mass was the same as we had on Sunday a few weeks back. The story takes place at the Last Supper. Jesus has taught his apostles for the previous three years and now He is giving them their final lessons. But they still don't get it. Poor, poor Philip. Philip enthusiastically says: "**Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.**" And I can just imagine Jesus shaking His head in frustration, just as many a teacher has, as He replies: "**Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?**" After three years, Jesus still needs to give Philip a tutorial to help him see the truth.

So, I am concerned about the possible frustration of being a teacher. But I am still considering that career as an option because I have also witnessed the "aha" moments when a student finally gets it; when everything finally comes together and understanding settles in. And that can be a great reward for the teacher. For the apostles, their "aha" moment was on Pentecost. We will officially celebrate Pentecost next week, on May 11. I say *officially* because I can argue that we have been celebrating Pentecost all during this Easter season. Each Sunday we have seen in the gospel story how the apostles acted when Jesus was still with them - before Pentecost. And each Sunday, up until today, we have

seen in the first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles, how very differently those same apostles acted after Pentecost.

I just talked about Philip who had the deer-in-the-headlights look at the Last Supper. But last week we heard about his adventures after Pentecost in the first reading. And this is what we heard: ***“Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Christ to them. With one accord, the crowds paid attention to what was said by Philip when they heard it and saw the signs he was doing. For unclean spirits, crying out in a loud voice, came out of many possessed people, and many paralyzed or crippled people were cured.”***

It was a big change for Philip. I can imagine Jesus looking down and smiling at how well His struggling student was doing now. What changed him? It was the Spirit that he received at Pentecost as Christ’s Church was born.

Today we celebrate the feast of the Ascension and we can reflect during this next week on how those days must have been for the disciples - those days between the time Jesus ascended into heaven and when He sent the Spirit upon them as tongues of fire. They were confused and felt abandoned. As Jesus rose into the clouds, they just stood there dazed looking into the sky. And the angels rebuked them saying, ***“Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky?”*** There is almost an implied continuation: ***“Didn’t Jesus just tell you to go out and be His witnesses to the ends of the earth.”***

Jesus knew His students needed more; they needed the Holy Spirit before they could carry out that mission, and that is what we will celebrate next week. But *we* have already received the Holy Spirit in the sacraments, especially in the sacrament of Confirmation. So what is our excuse for being timid and fearful and confused about being witnesses to Christ. Why do we sometimes feel like we have been abandoned even though Jesus told us in the gospel today: ***“I am with you always, until the end of the age.”***

Jesus is with us always, but sometimes we become too busy and preoccupied and distracted to notice. We need to spend some regular time in prayer to strengthen our bond with Jesus so that we know that we are not abandoned. We need to ask for the gifts of the Spirit, so that we can be courageous witnesses like Philip. We need to be good students and go regularly to our school, the Church, and do our homework studying the lessons of scriptures. Then we too can have our “aha” moments; those times when the truth of Jesus will be made more clear to us. And the Teacher, our Master, will smile and be very proud.

**Deacon Joe Hulway**