

Ascension-Year C

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May 17, 2007

Anyone who has ever flown in an airplane knows first hand what an incredible feat it is to fly. The experience of ascending and descending, that is taking off and landing is phenomenal. For me, at least, this incredible experience always evokes three particular realities. First, with all due respect to technology, there still remains something mysterious to flying, as evident by the array of questions that unfold particularly for first time fliers. Second, this experience always demands faith in the aircraft, the pilot and God. We believe that we will not only take-off safely but land safely as well. Finally, this experience of flying in the end is meant to be celebrated. Having studied in Rome and flown over the ocean numerous times I fondly remember the take-off and landings being followed by applause in the cabin.

Today the church honors something even more incredible than flying, namely, The Ascension of Jesus into glory. This event that we reveal today has some of the same realities of flying. It is mysterious. In fact, the Ascension is one of the glorious mysteries of the rosary. During the month of May dedicated to Mary and the rosary we have the opportunity to penetrate this mystery through our praying of the rosary. Second, this event is an object of faith in so far as it is an article of the creed. Every Sunday, during the Profession of Faith we profess our belief in this mystery. Finally, this event is something we celebrate as given our presence in church today. The church, in fact, obligates us to celebrate this event.

In celebrating this event that marks Jesus returns into glory, the scriptures encourage us to wait. In the first reading from Acts we hear these words about Jesus, "While meeting with them he enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for "the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak, for John baptized with water but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Waiting, of course is often easier said than done. But now is the time to patiently wait for the fulfillment of Jesus' promise and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Quite simply, all of our waiting, in traffic, at the store, in the doctor's office and in our relationships can become graced opportunities to wait for the Holy Spirit.

Part of waiting, however, always involves not knowing. We will never know it all, as much as we aspire to. Jesus points to this lack of knowledge when he says to his disciples, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the end of this earth", even to Penn Hills.

In a real sense this feast is all about placement. Jesus assumes his rightful place at the Father's right hand and we, for our part, occupy our place amid the mystery, with the gift of faith and a sense of celebration. Our place is to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit so that we can become witness to the world.

In the end let us echo the words of today's opening prayer,
God our Father
make us joyful in the ascension of your Son Jesus Christ.
May we follow him into the new creation for his ascension
is our glory and our hope.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one
God, for ever and ever. AMEN