

Ascension Sunday: May 24, 2020

St. Vincent de Paul Church, Baltimore

Reflections on Today's Scripture Readings

Acts 8:5-17 Ps. 66 1 Peter 3: 15-18 John 14: 15-21

When I was a child growing up Catholic, I loved all the feasts: St. Blaise with the crisscrossed candles against my throat, ashes on the forehead, Mary's may procession, Pentecost, Christmas and Easter, of course.

I hated the feast of the Ascension.

Why didn't Jesus stay on earth and finish what He started before His death and resurrection? Why do we have to wait until He comes again at the end of the world for Him to fix everything? When I was small, I was sick a lot, and that also wearied my parents. Jesus, after His resurrection, was even more powerful than before. He rose from the dead. He could appear anywhere out of thin air. Surely, He could have stayed on earth and taken care of all the world's problems and all the world's suffering, including mine. When Jesus ascended into heaven, He deliberately chose not to do that, leaving us behind in the same condition we've always been, with the promise that He would come again, someday.

When Jesus was on earth, He cured people of blindness, leprosy, deafness, lameness, paralysis. He restored health to people who were dying. Some people He raised from the dead. But, in all of these cures, He never relieved anyone's suffering. The people He cured still suffered, just in a different way. Jesus cannot relieve my suffering. It is something I must do myself. But I don't do it all by myself, alone. Through His ministry, preaching, death, and resurrection, Jesus showed the way--to embrace suffering, to go through suffering, to pass through suffering to resurrection. Through Jesus' ascension into heaven and taking His seat at the right hand of the Father, Jesus is my constant companion and guide on the way He showed us.

Jesus never did anything on earth He doesn't want us to do also. As He cared for others, He wants us to do. As He helped others to heal, He wants us to do. As He proclaimed the Gospel, He wants us to do. As He joined himself to the marginalized of society, He wants us to do. As He suffered death and rose from that death, He wants us to do. Most especially, as He saw himself as God's Son,

entering into the mystery of what that means, He wants us to see ourselves as He sees himself and enter into that mystery also. This is how suffering is overcome.

Jesus' ascension and taking His seat at God's right hand, then, is our empowerment. Jesus did not leave the world and go to a somewhere else heaven. Nor, for that matter, did He leave us behind to await His return at some future end of the world time. When we listen to the words Jesus proclaimed during His ministry, we know that heaven is not some other place, and the Father, at whose right hand Jesus sits, is not somewhere else. And so, at His ascension, Jesus entered a deeper here and a deeper now. We also enter this same deeper here and deeper now through prayer and whenever we care for someone else. Whenever we do that, Jesus comes again.

Chris Kreeger