

FEAST OF THE ASCENSION 2016

1st Reading: Acts 1:1-11 [You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit]

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 47 "God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord."

2nd Reading: Ephesians 1:17-23 [May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened]

Or : Hebrews 9:24-28;10:19-23 [Christ, who made the promise, is trustworthy]

Gospel: Luke 24:46-53 [I am sending the promise of my Father upon you]

*♪♪ "He is lord, he is lord, he is risen from the dead and he is lord.
Every knee shall bow and ev'ry tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." ♪♪*

That song ends with 3 names for the one whose feast is today: Jesus, Christ and Lord. All 3 are in the readings we heard. **Jesus** is the one who came into our world as a human being, like us, to remind us that we are created in the image & likeness of God. This Jesus of Nazareth had to ascend to the Father, so that **Christ** the **Lord** could be with the Church.

That's what we celebrate on Ascension Thursday. Jesus said in last Sunday's Gospel, "*The Father is greater than I*" to prepare his followers for his ascension to the Father. That was not a denial of his divinity, it was a promise that his presence in the Spirit would be greater & have more effect than his visible, tangible presence in the flesh.

The name *Christ* comes from the Greek form of the Hebrew for Messiah. While Jesus is a male human being, Christ risen from the dead embraces all of humanity. St. Paul writes, "*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*"

The Ascension is one day in the 50 day celebration of Easter that concludes on Pentecost. In the first reading from the Acts, it is the 40th day of that celebration & the day before the 1st novena, the 9 days of prayer between Ascension and Pentecost.

But in the Gospels of John & Luke, it happens shortly after the resurrection. It was not celebrated as a separate day for centuries in the Church. It is one facet of the diamond of the *Paschal Mystery* - the life, death, resurrection, & ascension of Jesus and the sending of the Holy Spirit. The ascension is one color of the rainbow of the mystery of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our brother.

We say & sing that Jesus Christ is Lord. That's more than an intellectual or theological statement. It is a call to let Christ be the lord of my life, of all of my life - of my money, my computer & smart phone, of my sexuality and my work. To let Christ be my lord is to trust - even when a flood comes through my neighborhood or illness comes to me or someone I love. As we read in the Letter to the Hebrews, "*Let us hold unwaveringly to the faith that gives us hope, for the one who made the promise is trustworthy,*"

I can't really live my faith that "Jesus Christ is Lord" until I admit that I am *not* the lord, that I am not in control of the most important areas of my life. I don't believe that we can understand & live the Gospel Jesus preached and lived *until* we accept that we are not in control, and allow ourselves to suffer that pain for the sake of love.

Then the beatitudes make sense. Another way to say, Blessed are the poor in spirit is Blessed are they who know they cannot earn love or make life happen the way they want it to.

One of my friends who was active in AA for many years often told me & anyone who would listen about an inspiration he had while on his first Cursillo. He was not sure he believed in God, and he had been trying without success to stop drinking, when he finally admitted that he was not in control. He loved to tell the story, and would say: *"At that moment, I discovered two things: That there is a God, and that it's not me!"*

But the paradox is that if I accept the suffering of not being in control, I am free to allow Jesus to be my Lord, the Lord of every part of my life. In that moment, I can receive the same power the disciples received in the first reading: The power of the Holy Spirit.

If I let Jesus be my savior and receive each moment of my life as a grace, according to the measure of his gift, not my own worthiness, I will receive the gifts Paul describes in the Letter to the Ephesians: The gift of a calling which gives meaning to my life, even in a world that feels like it's falling apart, and a church that is in need of reform. The gift of unity with other believers, with other members of Christ's human family, even with creation itself. The gift of rising above illness, evil and danger. The gift of being able to give and receive love.

In the reading from the Acts we hear the words, John baptized with water, but you will be baptized by the Holy Spirit. What does that mean for us here and now? It is both a blessing and a challenge. Like the apostles, we have to let go of what used to be - in their case, it was the physical presence of Jesus, even after his resurrection - in order to receive his Spirit in our hearts. And once we have received that spirit, we open ourselves to being melted, molded, filled and used. But for that to happen, something has to be emptied - we have to let go of our separateness and our sense that the world revolves around us.

As we celebrate the nine days before Pentecost - the novena to the Holy Spirit -
let us pray in the words of another song:

*♪♪ Spirit of the living God fall afresh on us. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us.
Melt us, mold us, fill us, use us. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us. ♪♪*

