

Ascension – 2023

Picture, if you will, your Home. What does that simple word mean to you, “Home?” Some would picture where you are living now; maybe others look back to years ago, to a place no longer the same. Home is the place we belong, where we are free to be ourselves, where we can relax when work is done, where the things most precious to us are kept. The importance of home is also seen in the suffering of those who are homeless, or far away from home – in the military, as refugees, perhaps in long-term care, or those whose homes have been destroyed by natural disaster or war or the breakup of family – for them, home will never be the same. But even these losses teach us we are meant for something greater than our current life with its troubles and fragile joys; we need a home beyond all the limitations and sorrows we know here.

At the Last Supper, Jesus had told the Twelve: ***“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places ... I am going to prepare a place for you, and then I shall come back to take you to myself, so that where I am, you also may be.”*** The Ascension unveils our future: where Jesus has gone into glory, so we too can go. This is not about Jesus going from one place to another. ***Instead, this conclusion to Jesus’ earthly ministry means something very different:*** not that Jesus is gone from us, but rather that He even more present to us. ***In rising from death, Jesus has passed beyond the boundaries we know as space and time, and the Ascension means He has brought our human nature into the permanent presence of God. Now, every heart and every home, across any place and time, can be a home for the Lord.***

Matthew remembered well the mood of the Eleven as Jesus prepared to conclude His visible presence among them: ***“They worshiped, but they doubted.”*** That mood ... worship but also doubt ... captures the ongoing experience of the Church throughout time. Their doubt was not about Jesus: it was about themselves. If they had so often misunderstood Him, failed Him, even abandoned Him while He was among them, how could they possibly succeed when He was gone? And how are we supposed to continue the same mission now, after all these years amid all of today’s problems?

Jesus' answer to their doubts, and ours, is the same: ***"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you"*** – power that is given, ***not to overwhelm***, but rather to support and sustain us, even when we are asked to persevere with unanswered questions. It is God's Spirit, and thus God's kind of power, that is promised to us: the power of grace and love – the power that we must wait for, and humbly receive. The power works in many ways, but the most direct is what we experience here in the Eucharist. St. Leo the Great put it in pithy but profound words: "Our Lord's visible presence has passed into the sacraments." We don't see Him directly, but we don't see nothing at all. In the Eucharist, His promise is daily kept: "I am with you always, until the end of the age."

Jesus promises a home, a place to belong at the end of our journey, when our life's work is done, where we will be fully ourselves, where all that is truly worthy of being precious to us will again be found, and enjoyed forever. We will know ourselves as loved, ***at home with the Lord***. All the restlessness of spirit we experience in our pilgrimage of life will be over, and ***we will find our rest in God***.

When you get home today, take a minute to look around with new eyes at the familiar things and places and people, and know that Jesus is also present there, making every place His home in a redeemed world. ***And, pick out one thing in your home that you can donate to another home in need***. That combination of ***looking up and looking out*** is a great way to honor the Ascension. Today, we do not simply remember that Jesus once WAS, but that Jesus now IS – walking with us on our way Home.