



SACRED HEART CHURCH OF THE FIRST PEOPLES

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ASCENSION SUNDAY—C *Redeemed and Sanctified into New Life*

The readings today call us to be witnesses to a new and living way.

In the Gospel, we see that we can now enter the sanctuary by a new and living way, through the curtain of Jesus' flesh. This of course refers to the curtain of the Temple that was torn in two from top to bottom the moment that Jesus died upon the cross.

That Temple veil was to separate the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple, and from the ordinary people. Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and that once a year. That veil was to keep people out of the Holy of Holies. With Jesus' death and resurrection, the separation between heaven and earth is now removed. We can now see within the very heart of God.

What we find in the heart of God is mercy, compassion, unconditional love, total non-violence and forgiveness. In that light, repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to all nations, spreading out from Jerusalem. This new life, eternal life, is ours when we take stock of our lives, admit our wrong-doing especially in sacramental confession, receive God's forgiveness and healing, and filled with the Holy Spirit, are sent out to share that good news of God's love and forgiveness with all others.

The twofold mission of Jesus was to *redeem* and to *sanctify* our wounded and alienated humanity. He redeemed us by his death. As the reading puts it, Jesus removed sin by the offering of himself, and will come back to save us. He will return a second time not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. So here is the twofold mission: Jesus redeemed us by his death, and will save us by his second coming to take us into the fullness of eternal life with him.



This spiritual reality is so real and so present to us that we are to approach him with a true heart in full assurance of faith and repentance, that is, with hearts sprinkled clean of an evil conscience. So, we are to wait for Jesus with faith, hope and repentance and so enter into his sanctuary.

There is another dimension to the readings today. In the reading from Acts, we are told that after his suffering he presented himself alive to the apostles by many convincing

proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking to them about the Kingdom of God. Imagine what those precious days must have been like – the Risen Lord appearing to the apostles and his disciples, walking and talking with them, and teaching them especially two things: the first, as mentioned, is all about the Kingdom of God. The other would have to be the need to grieve and mourn his loss. That is, they would no longer have him with them in the flesh, but if they believed, they would have his presence to them in an even better way – through the gift of his Holy Spirit.

Jesus came to inaugurate the Reign of God here, among us, and especially in and through the Church, which was to become his Body, his presence here on earth. What a lofty mission has been given to us. We are to make present his love and caring, and in that way do what he did, make present to humanity the love and caring of the Father for all peoples, and for all of creation.



Patty attended a 12 Step Pilgrimage. A fashion designer, she stood out from all the rest of the participants with her brand name clothing and flashy jewellery. As the program progressed, however, it became apparent to her group that she was out of touch with her reality. She was very unemotional, with an intellectual approach to everything, including pain. She would interrupt someone's sharing to ask questions like, "Well, what is pain anyway?"

When it was her turn to share before crowd with her family group the next morning, however, she broke into tears, fell to the floor, and began to hyperventilate. Luckily, the director was very experienced with this phenomenon. With some help he took her into the sacristy, opened a window to give her fresh air, and calmed her down. He mentioned to the team that she would be okay. She had simply bottled up a lifetime of emotion such as hurt and guilt, and it all tried to come out at once.

Part of her story was fighting with her husband, who then raped her. She told him she wished him dead. He died in a car accident the next day, which left her riddled with guilt and in shock. In her pain and numbness, she aborted their child. Finally, through the secure environment and caring process of the pilgrimage, she was beginning to experience the understanding, the compassion, the forgiveness of a loving God from whom she had run for so many years. She was beginning to enter into a new and living way of life that Jesus promised to give us.

The Eucharist that we celebrate together now is an appearance of Jesus to us, like the meal in the inn at Emmaus, the meal on the shore of Lake Tiberias and the fish Jesus ate before the eyes of the Apostles. It is an experience for us of acceptance, love and forgiveness that empowers us to do same, to let go, and experience the Ascension which leads to living Pentecost each day of our lives, in peace and joy.

Archbishop Emeritus Sylvain Lavoie, OMI

LIVING BEYOND DOUBT

What should be our reaction in the face of the fact that God often seems silent, distant, dead? How do we move from believing only in the physical, from believing in the reality of only what we can see, feel, touch, taste, and smell, to believing in the existence of deeper, spiritual, realities?

One answer can be found in the biblical account of the apostle Thomas, and his doubt about the resurrection of Jesus. Remember how he protests: “Unless I can (physically) place my finger in the wounds of his hands and stick my finger into the wound of his side, I will not believe.” It is noteworthy that Jesus offers no resistance or rebuke in the face of this remark. Instead, he takes Thomas at his word: “Come here, and (physically) place your finger in the wounds of my hand and the wound in my side; see for yourself that I am real and not a ghost.”

That is an open challenge for all of us: “Come and see for yourselves that I am real and not a ghost!” That challenge has a couple of conditions, however: honesty and generosity.

Skepticism and agnosticism, even atheism, are not a problem if one is honest, non-rationalizing, non-lying, ready to efface oneself before reality as it appears, **and** generous in giving his or her life away in service. If these conditions are met, God, the author and source of all reality, will eventually become evident, even to those who need physical proof. The story of Thomas teaches us that, and assures us that God is neither angered nor threatened by an honest agnosticism.



Faith is never a certainty. Neither is it the sure feeling that God exists. There are, for every one of us, dark nights of the soul, silences of God, cold lonely seasons, bitter times when God’s appearances to us cannot be truly grasped or recognized.

The history of faith, as witnessed by the life of Jesus and the lives of the saints, shows us that God often seems dead and, at those times, the reality of the empirical world can so overpower us that nothing seems real except what we can see and feel right now, namely our own pain

Ron Rolheiser, San Antonio, Texas

ASCENSION OF THE LORD

The feast of the Ascension of the Lord is not a feast which brings an end to Jesus' work rather this feast marks transition from a limited sphere of activities like preaching, healing, living and dying within the geographical space of Israel to the exalted position of being in glory at the Father's right hand and interceding for us all.

Forty days recalls the experience of the two prophet ancestors who had spoken with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration. For forty days God instructed Moses in the law on Mount Sinai, for forty days Elijah journeyed to Horeb before his encounter with God in the absolute silence outside the cave. Forty is also a biblical number of transitions to a new stage of salvation history. For forty days the apostles share the company of the risen Jesus, eat with him, and wait for the Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father who will be given to them. Therefore, the Ascension points to the need for Pentecost and the Spirit-filled passion that will make the disciples the witnesses of Jesus throughout the world until he comes again.

In today's Gospel, Luke explains that suffering is not the last word for any of us. Christ comes to his followers and offers them his blessing. Through his death, resurrection and ascension Jesus restores to them a deeper sense of hope and peace. This experience of faith will continue to remain with them in the Spirit promised by the Father. This is also very clear in the Acts of the Apostles where Luke tells of the presence of Christ in the early Church reminding us of the Lord's promise that we will never be alone. He also reminds us that through Christ's passion and his rising from death that are the source of our hope. The ascension experience tells us that Christ has conquered everything of the past and the present and is with us to the end of time. He leaves behind us the Advocate so that we might be people of the spirit, people with a new dignity who are reconciled with one another. Definitely, his return to the Father in glory gives us new cause to celebrate our redeemed humanity. Luke concludes his Gospel by again opening his disciples' eyes and hearts to the Scriptures, as he had done at Emmaus. But now he goes further by commissioning them to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all the nations. Again, before their ascending Lord, the disciples prostrate themselves with joy and just as Luke's Gospel had begun in the Temple and so also it ends there.



As we gather around his table, it is good to ask the question. What is it that stops us celebrating our redeemed humanity? One thing that often holds us back is our fear: fear of failure, fear of being alone, fear of being misunderstood or fear of death etc. The truth is that Christ has conquered everything, and he is simply asking us to trust in him and let go of our fears that we might ascend to a new level of human integrity. Accepting our vocation is one of the greatest honors we can show our redeemed humanity. By accepting and pursuing our God given vocation we are extending the incarnation of Jesus in history and are fulfilling the hope of God that we will go to the ends of the earth to share the good news.

By Susai Jesu, OMI

LEAVING PEACE BEHIND AS OUR FAREWELL GIFT

In the Gospel of John, Jesus gives a long farewell speech at the Last Supper on the night before he dies.

His disciples, understandably, are shaken, afraid, and not prepared to accept the brute reality of his impending death. He tries to calm them, reassure them, give them things to cling to, and he ends with these words: I am going away, but I will leave you a final gift, the gift of my peace.

I suspect that almost everyone reading this will have had an experience of grieving the death of a loved one, a parent, spouse, child, or friend, and finding, at least after a time, beneath the grief a warm sense of peace whenever the memory of the loved one surfaces or is evoked. I lost both of my parents when I was in my early twenties and, sad as were their farewells, every memory of them now evokes a warmth. Their farewell gift was the gift of peace.

How do we live in such a way that peace will be our final farewell gift to our families, our loved ones, our faith community, and our world?

Peace, as we know, is a whole lot more than the simple absence of war and strife. Peace is constituted by two things: harmony and completeness. To be at peace something must have an inner consistency so that all of its movements are in harmony with each other, and it must also have a completeness so that it is not still aching for something it is missing.

When Jesus promises peace as his farewell gift, he identifies it with the Holy Spirit; and, as we know, that is the spirit of charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, longsuffering, fidelity, mildness, and chastity.

When some people leave anything - a job, a marriage, a family, or a community - they leave chaos behind, a legacy of disharmony, unfinished business, anger, bitterness, jealousy, and division. And then there are others who leave behind a legacy of harmony and completeness, a spirit of understanding, compassion, affirmation, and unity.

Going away in death has the same dynamic. By the way we live and die we will leave behind either a spirit that perennially haunts the peace of our loved ones, or we will leave behind a spirit that brings a warmth every time our memory is evoked.

Ron Rolheiser, San Antonio, Texas

READINGS FOR ASCENSION SUNDAY

FIRST READING

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1.1-11)

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the Apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Psalm 47)

Response: God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.

Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with loud songs of joy. For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome, a great king over all the earth. R.

God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. R.

For God is the king of all the earth; sing praises with a Psalm. God is king over the nations; God sits on his holy throne. R.

SECOND READING

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews (Hebrews 9.24-28; 10.19-23)

In the spirit the Angel carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It has the glory of God and

a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal.

It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve Angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel; on the east there were three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb.

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

Thanks be to God

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia. Alleluia.

Go, make disciples of all nations; I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Alleluia.

GOSPEL READING

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke (Luke 24.44-53)

Jesus said to the disciples, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you — that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

"And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples

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