

HOMILY ASCENSION SUNDAY – C (Homily 02)

“Witness to a New and Living Way”

(Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47; Heb 9:24-28, 10:19-23; Luke 24:46-53)

Were you watching when Canada’s men’s’ hockey team won the Gold medal at the Olympics? Do you remember where you were? Did you share in the excitement?

We have reason to feel even greater excitement over the Word of God this morning and the message for us all: Be a joyful witness to a new and living way.

In the first reading, the disciples still don’t really get it. They want Jesus to restore the kingdom to Israel. They want a better version of the old, of what used to be. Instead of that, Jesus promises them the Spirit that will transform them into his witnesses to a new reality.

In the Gospel, they experience a glimpse of that new reality in their encounter with the Jesus. Here, Jesus reminds them that he has fulfilled all the passages in the Scriptures that are about him. He then promises to send a power from on high; a new kind of power. He promises to send the Spirit of forgiveness to those who believe. The ability to genuinely repent of one’s own sin, and the power to forgive those who have hurt us, is the way into this new life in Jesus, in his kingdom.

The second reading drives home that same message. This Jesus who stands before them has opened up for us a new and living way through the curtain that separated this world from the next. This is the meaning of the Paschal Mystery. Jesus first descended into hell, the worst possible experience any human being could have, then ascended to heaven and shares that life with us through faith, hope, waiting and especially forgiveness.

One of the most needed, and most precious gifts of the Holy Spirit, is the ability to forgive those who hurt us. Forgiveness is the ability to let go of revenge, to let go of anger. Forgiveness is what Jesus did on the Cross. Forgiveness is what he breathed into the disciples in the Upper Room. Forgiveness is THE gift of the Holy Spirit.

We experience the ascension in our lives when we can deal with our anger and hurt, feel the emotions and empty ourselves of those painful emotions by sharing them with others. Above all, we will experience Ascension powerfully if we can communicate those emotions with love to the very person or persons who may

have hurt us in the first place.

The following letter by a fourteen year old girl who worked with her pastor on a healing journey is an example of Ascension, of letting go, of forgiveness. Her honest struggle and desire to forgive and heal can be an inspiration to us. Here is the letter that she wrote in the course of her healing journey and read to her abuser.

“Dear abuser, I need to share something with you. I am trying to forgive something you did to me. Remember last year when you were at our house, you and me were watching TV, and you did something that felt really wrong, and now seeing you today makes me feel like killing myself again. My life was really going good and the way I wanted it to be, but since that night my life totally changed. I felt dead, I felt dirty, and I felt ashamed of myself. Recently my life was going good, until you came here, and all those feelings came back to me. Tell me why did you do that to me, why did it seem like my life was wrecked when it was going so well? I don't want to live the life that I used to live after you molested me. Thank you for reading this letter. I hope that writing this letter to you will help me to heal myself and forgive you. Once again, why did you do this to me? Is it because something like this happened to you when you were younger? Maybe you need help also. Sincerely, C.

The key to forgiveness is to communicate our painful feelings to the hurtful other with love, seeking no revenge, retaliation or even desire to punish. As difficult as it is, the girl who wrote this letter managed to do it with love. When we do this we are just like Jesus on the cross, and when we act like God we get to feel like God. Our innocence and dignity returns; our peace and joy returns - a taste of the very reign of God. That is the meaning of this feast of the Ascension.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is itself an experience of the love and forgiveness of our God who accepts us as we are and also believes in who we can become, his people, a people who can forgive like him, an Ascension people.

So remember, there is an excitement in our life of faith that is greater than that over winning a hockey game. We are invited today to ascend into heaven with Jesus, through his power to forgive. We are then commissioned to be joyful witnesses to this new and living way of life that he has given to us.