

## HOMILY ASCENSION SUNDAY - YEAR A

“Let Go and Let God”

(Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47; Ephesians 1:17-23; Matthew 28:16-20)

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A rabbi said to a precocious six-year-old boy: “So your mother says your prayers for you each night? That is very commendable. What does she say?” The little boy replied, “Thank God he’s in bed!”

This feast of the Ascension means to let go and let God; to forgive and accept; to teach and to live our faith.

After the pivotal point of human history, his death-resurrection, Jesus returns to found his church. He now sends the eleven to all nations, not just the Jews; with baptism, not circumcision as the initiation rite, with His commands, not the Mosaic law, as final norm of morality. This is a very creative text coming uniquely from Matthew.

The Ascension of Jesus is part of the dynamic movement of God’s Spirit at work in our history through the historical Jesus: first his Incarnation, then his Public Life, his Passion, Death and Resurrection, his Appearances to his disciples, the Ascension that we celebrate today, and finally, the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost.

The dynamic movement of God’s Spirit at work in us, in our personal and communal history, is similar. Today we celebrate the impact of the Ascension on our lives. Two elements that the ascension highlights stand out immediately: forgiveness, and acceptance; or letting go and letting God.

Forgiveness involves facing and dealing with our own hurts that have come to us throughout our lives. We all have them: abuse, neglect, put downs, dysfunctional families and societies, abusive authority figures. In our lack of faith, we tended to block out, repress and stuff our feelings of especially anger and resentment. We build up big stories, live in those stories, and carry the past into our present, affecting our future. We become like time bombs waiting to explode, or like poisonous snakes oozing out venom at the least provocation.

Ron Rolheiser writes that the commandment we break the most is the 5th: “Thou Shalt not kill”. We kill not physically, but with our angry words and resentful comments. Henri Nouwen comments that “No one is shot with a bullet who has not been first shot with a word.” And no one has been shot with a word who has not been first shot with a thought. Oh yes, how often we kill, in big and little ways.

Ascension is the invitation to follow Jesus into forgiveness. We are to do what he did; deal with our hurts, face them, feel the feelings, and then, in faith and with God’s help, forgive, let go, give them all to God. We are to let them ascend to the Father, with Jesus, and through him, forgive from the heart, and new freedom will be ours. We will be able to move on in our lives, with peace, joy and freedom in our hearts that were so hard and bitter before our own personal experience of the Ascension of Jesus.

The second aspect of this feast of Ascension is Acceptance. Acceptance means to face our losses in life. We all have them: loved ones, culture, language, career, education, health, relationships, family time, reputation, opportunities, the list goes on. We become like cemeteries, dying inside, empty shells, full of sadness, self pity and stuck in grief.

Many of our addictions come out of all this repressed anger and grief - we keep busy, drink, shoot up, gamble, eat too much, eat too little, work too hard, gossip - all to either numb out the painful feelings, or avoid feeling them at all. We become the walking wounded, emotional cripples.

Ascension is the invitation to follow Jesus into acceptance. We are to do what he did - face the losses, feel the feelings, and grieve, weep, mourn those losses, as Jesus wept over Jerusalem, over the death of his friend Lazarus, and as he cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Then we are to move on, in and with Jesus, to a profound act of faith in God's power to lift us up again out of our pain, as we let go and accept our losses; let them ascend to the Father; give them to God. We are then able to receive the Spirit of Jesus who has gone before us, and move on with our lives, full of God's Spirit of peace, joy, acceptance and hope.

Jesus, fully established in glory, missions his body, the Church, to incarnate that new reality here on earth through discipleship. Discipleship involves witnessing to his death and resurrection, baptism into fellowship with the Trinity and the Church, and teaching and living the command to love. The living out of that teaching of love for one another as he has loved us seems to be the key. And "communicating with love" to our enemies is probably the most visible and viable way to live out that teaching. In the Ascension, Jesus lifted up all of creation to a higher level. Now it is up to us. In faith, we can also join in that upward movement, through forgiveness and acceptance.

John had suffered for years working under a racist boss who tried every trick in the book to get him fired, just because he was aboriginal. On the way to Cursillo one day, John started to get second thoughts, and headed south to another city instead. Just then the song, "The Old Rugged Cross" came on the radio, and for some reason, John started to cry. The song touched his heart, and he decided to turn back and go to the Cursillo after all. There, he learned all about forgiveness, and thought about his racist boss who for eight years had tried to make life miserable for him and kept looking for a way to fire him. When he got home, he phoned him up, thanked him for making life miserable for him, and told him that he forgave him. His boss was silent and couldn't even say a word, but the next Sunday, he was in church for the first time in years.

The Eucharist we celebrate today is a great act of faith in that dynamic movement of God, and in faith, it is at work in our lives even now as we celebrate. Through Word and Sacrament, we are joined to Jesus who ascended to the Father, and so do we, even now, today.

So, have faith in Jesus, and like him, forgive and accept; let Go and let God, and you too will experience Ascension in your life.