

HOMILY ASCENSION SUNDAY - C

“Letting Go and Letting God”

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

What did one earthquake say to another? - It's your fault!

Life is a mystery to be lived, not a problem to be solved.

Have faith in Jesus - Live the Paschal Mystery and experience the Ascension in your life.

The feast of the Ascension is only one of six distinct moments of the Paschal Mystery - Passion, Death, Resurrection, Appearances, Ascension and Pentecost.

The least known and most often ignored of these is the Appearances of Jesus to his disciples. I call this the missing mystery. We skip over it when we recite the Creed (Jesus rose from the dead, - ascended into heaven). We omit it when we pray the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary (Resurrection, - Ascension, Pentecost). It is also omitted when we pray the Eucharistic prayer. That is unfortunate, because of its relevance for us today. The Appearances of Jesus are a time of healing and grieving. In the garden Jesus was teaching Mary Magdalene to let go, to let him ascend to the Father. “Do not cling to me” is what he told her. She could not have him back the way she had him before. He was the same, yet he had changed. He would never die again, and that eternal life is what he wants to give to us, if we can also let go of that which holds us back from receiving it. Our grief over any loss in our lives must turn into good grieving, mourning, and letting go, giving back to God that which we want to cling to, so that we can be open to the newness of the Spirit God wants to give us in Jesus. We are called to live and experience the Appearances and the Ascension as a mystery of faith.

Someone who understood and lived this mystery is Velma. She was sexually molested as a young teenage girl. The trauma of that incident left her with such shame that she gave up her dream of becoming a religious sister. She became an alcoholic and struggled in her marriage. When her youngest child took a Search (a weekend retreat for youth), she realized how her secret burden had affected her children. She decided to go on a healing journey that took her through her own personal Paschal Mystery.

Her suffering was her Passion; the loss of her dream was her Death; her survival was her Resurrection, but she learned that God wanted more than a survivor full of anger, guilt and resentment – God wanted to give her peace, joy and freedom. She was invited by her spiritual guide to go through the appearances and experience ascension in her life. She learned to remember her past instead of block it out; to relive the hurtful events; to feel the feelings and share them with others. She learned the importance of dealing with her past, of grieving and mourning her loss. That was the Appearances for her. Then she was invited to write out her painful feelings with love (no revenge or name-calling) and share them with her abuser as a way of forgiving him and letting go of anger and resentment, sadness and shame. That was for her, Ascension. And she was set free to move on with her life.

She now has a deeper understanding, a new image of who God is for her, a “Messiah who suffers.” She learned that Jesus does not prevent our pain, but rather shares it with us and gives us the love to deal with it and heal it through repentance and forgiveness. She came to truly trust in this power from on high, the Holy Spirit, the agent of forgiveness, and now experiences the reign of God in her life, the peace and joy that only God can give.

We can ask ourselves - where are we at in this process of living the Paschal Mystery? Are we carrying spiritual garbage from past hurts? Is there buried anger and resentment, sadness and self-pity, shock and shame, guilt and fear in our lives? It is by going back, facing and dealing with our past hurts and losses, and finding Jesus there in that past, that we will be able to grieve, heal, let go, experience “Ascension,” and receive the Spirit of new life from our God who “suffered with us,” touches and heals our wounds, and walks with us through our own “Paschal Mystery” to a new life of freedom, peace and joy.

In short, the Ascension signifies that our humanity has been elevated, raised above the highest angels and spirit beings in the heavens. We already share in God’s glory, through faith in Jesus and the experience of the Ascension in our own lives through faith.

According to Hurs von Balthasar, what seemed to separate us from God, our mortal flesh, has become, in Christ’s Ascension, precisely that which penetrated all the way to the Father, washed our “bad conscience” clean, and granted us an “unchanging confession of hope” in God’s “faithfulness”, which has now proven itself definitively.

Corbin Eddy offers another insight. By being gathered into a cloud, Jesus is not so much *going up* as he is *going ahead* of his apostles into glory. The issue is not where Jesus was or is, but where he is sending them, clothed with power from on high. The direction is not down or up, but *out*. They are not longer only hearers of the word, but its heralds. The issue is not so much our faith in Jesus, but Jesus’ faith in us. The mystery of the Ascension invites us, even in our shakiness, not so much to believe in God, but to believe that God believes in us. In other words, don’t get stuck looking down in discouragement, or looking up in bewilderment. Staff in hand, mantle around your shoulders, look out and step out with grace and courage.

The Eucharist that we celebrate together now is an appearance of Jesus to us, like the seashore meal of fish, the meal in the restaurant, 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.

So, remember, life is a mystery to be lived, not a problem to be solved. Have faith - live the Paschal Mystery and experience the Ascension in your life. May God bless us all.