

ASCENSION SUNDAY – B (Homily 02)  
“Bridging Heaven and Earth”  
(Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47; Ephesians 4:1-13; Mark 16:15-20)  
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Today we celebrate the feast of the Ascension. What are we to make of this feast that marks the beginning of the end of the great season of Easter?

May I suggest that this feast invites us to live in heaven, right here on earth? It invites us to bridge heaven and earth; to live in a New Jerusalem, right here, right now.

The dilemma of the apostles in the first reading from Acts is perhaps our problem too. They had great expectations of Jesus, he who had been crucified but had risen from the dead and overcome the power of evil. Now surely he would be able to banish the Romans, restore power to the Israelites and give them glory and honour.

Surely they were confused and disappointed at the response of Jesus. Instead of granting them power and glory, he speaks of waiting for the Holy Spirit and being witnesses to a new reality, the reign of God here on earth, a New Jerusalem. What was he talking about?

Corbin Eddy, in his commentary on this gospel, uses a linguistic concept to help us understand what Jesus is up to. He uses the word Jerusalem and the Hebrew concept of balancing opposites to explain the reality of the Ascension.

The Hebrew language has two ways of understanding and expressing opposites. There are opposites that are opposing opposites, like good and bad. But there are also opposites that are balancing opposites, like left and right, up and down, right brain and left brain. Many things, such as eyes and ears, come in pairs. They are balancing opposites, not really opposing opposites.

The English language use of the plural, however, cannot capture this. When we say “eyes” in English, it does not connote a pair. It could refer to many eyes. In Hebrew, however, there is a plural ending, *eim*, that connotes precisely a balancing pair.

According to Eddy, the word *Jerushaleim* is that kind of plural. The word itself, meaning city of peace, is plural – a balancing opposite kind of plural. Jerushaleim is plural as eyes and ears are plural. There is an earthly city and a heavenly city; there’s a real Jerusalem and an ideal Jerusalem; there’s a practical project and a dream, all in a special kind of balance. In other words, in our ascension language, *up* and *down* are not really opposites, heaven and earth are not opposites. They are not separate places, but two complementary realities in which we are invited to live. They balance each other.

The implication of all this for us is that when Jesus ascended into heaven, he took with him our redeemed humanity. In the Incarnation, he took on our humanity. In his baptism in the Jordan, he took on our sinful humanity. On the cross, he redeemed us and through the resurrection, he brought about a new way of being in this world. Now through his

ascension, he opens up for us that new way of being that is the possibility of experiencing the very life of heaven, the peace, joy and justice of the Holy Spirit, right here and right now. That process would be completed at Pentecost, the sending of the Spirit upon the church to make them witnesses to this new way of life.

Someone who understood and acted on this new reality was Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest and founder of the Center for Contemplation and Action in New Mexico. As a young priest, he was very involved in the charismatic movement and founded a community they called New Jerusalem. Their hope as a community was precisely to realize in their lives what Jesus was talking about at his ascension. He told his followers not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Holy Spirit and they would be his witnesses to this new way of life in Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth.

We are the disciples of Jesus today, called to bridge heaven and earth through faith and love. We are his witnesses today, called to live in the reign of God, called to live as if we had already died and gone to heaven. That is because through our baptism into Jesus and lives of love through his Spirit, we have already died and are called to live in heaven, here on earth. Do we believe this?

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is our sharing in the heavenly banquet. We are fed by the Word of God and nourished by the Body and Blood of Jesus who is sitting at the right hand of the Father. The Spirit of Jesus empowers us to also be there, at the right hand of the Father, right here and now on earth.

So on this feast of the Ascension of Jesus into heaven, let us bridge heaven and earth and live in a New Jerusalem. Let us make our own that beautiful Pentecost antiphon, fill us with your Spirit Lord, and renew the face of the earth.