

On Sunday, most of the Catholic Church in the United States celebrates the feast of the Ascension of Jesus into heaven. The return of Jesus to the Father is another important moment in God's plan of salvation, as it sets the stage for the sending of the Holy Spirit.

In the account of the Ascension found in the Acts of the Apostles, the risen Jesus appears to the apostles, and gives them further instructions, preparing them for the coming of the Spirit. Luke tells us that when Jesus is taken up into heaven, the apostles look up to the sky, trying to get the last glimpse of Him before He totally leaves their sight. They stand there, transfixed, until two angels say to them: "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven."

There are times in our lives when we may be like the apostles, looking up to heaven, desperately seeking some sign of God's love and care for us. We look at the recent news about people predicting the end of the world, and we remember the times in the Gospels when Jesus told us that no one but the Father knows when the end times will come. But in the midst of so many crises in our world, and in the midst of crises in our own lives, we may still find ourselves looking for some sign of reassurance.

In our Scripture readings we find some reassurance. Not only do we have what the angels say to the apostles in our first reading from Acts, we hear from St. Paul in our second reading from Ephesians: "May the eyes of [your] hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe..." And at the end of our Gospel reading from Matthew, Jesus says: "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

Jesus is with us always. The same Son of God who rose from the dead can lift us up! Not only do the Scriptures testify to this, but our own experience as well. We know of the times when God has been faithful in our lives. Putting our trust in God, we need not stand still, so to speak, looking for constant reassurance. Instead, we are to be like the apostles, who *did* stop looking at the sky, and went about the work they were called to do, in the Holy Spirit.

What are *we* to do? In our Gospel reading, Jesus is clear: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." And so, we are called to make disciples. This does not mean we force our beliefs on others, or get in the business of condemning them. It is not our place to do so. Instead, we are called to share our faith, by word *and* deed, to a world so much in need of Good News! We are to teach them all that Jesus has commanded us to do. Again, we do not teach as if we knew everything there was to know about being Christian, or about being holy. But we can share what God has done for us and for His people throughout history. We can teach by example, not treating others so much as our pupils but as fellow pilgrims on the way. The more we are in touch with the "surpassing power" of God in our lives, the more we are able to love as Jesus has loved us. That is how disciples are made.

May God continue to bless us all, reassure us of His love, and open us to His call.

In Christ,

Fr. Phil, CP