

FEAST OF THE ASCENSION

May 29, 2022

Reflection by Sister Benita Coffey, OSB

Acts 1:1-11; Eph 1:17-23; Lk 24:46-53

The greater part of today's readings are from the writings of St. Luke, who in the prologue to his gospel clearly acknowledged that he was among the many writers who were not eyewitnesses of Jesus' life. Luke and others were men who relied on the word as handed down. Luke's works consist of two volumes, written around the year 80 of the Christian era: the Gospel attributed to him, and the Acts of the Apostles.

Today's first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles, speaks of the 40 days after the resurrection when Jesus remained with his followers. He was proving again to them that indeed he was the same Jesus, now risen and glorified, whom they had come to trust and follow. Our scriptures over these six weeks of Eastertide have reminded us repeatedly.

Today we are hearing that Jesus was leaving them for good. After 40 days he was promising the coming of the Spirit and telling his loyal followers they were to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The details spell it out: Jesus was lifted up and a cloud took him from their sight. The cloud is emphasized. It is a cloud that received him, but the cloud is also veiling him. Surely perplexed and confused, those close companions were eased undoubtedly when "two men in white garments" appeared to assure them of another coming--- one day.

From there as the story continues, they go back to Jerusalem and wait together in prayer for the Spirit's coming. (and that will be our next feast, Pentecost). So the Acts' account is a prelude to the mission of the disciples. Their challenge was to be the on-going growth of the Church.

But Luke chose to also use his writing to focus on the Ascension as the climax of Jesus work. Today's Gospel text deals with the Ascension as the concluding event on that very marvelous day of Jesus' Resurrection. The whole of Chapter 24 is about that same day. It starts with the resurrection, discovered by the women come to anoint Jesus. The day's events include the

appearance on the road to Emmaus, Jesus presence suddenly where the disciples had gathered, and that little fish dinner where he proved he wasn't a ghost.

Then, finally he reminded them that all of this had been anticipated. The whole of his life had led to this. At his baptism those words heard: "This is my Son"; later the Transfiguration. With his death and resurrection, it is now over. It's time for Jesus to send these faithful friends to preach in his name. He clearly assured them the Father would be with them, and they should just stay and wait for the promised strength, the Spirit.

Then Jesus led them out as far as Bethany, raised his hands, and blessed them. With that blessing the disciples' hearts were open to receive his peace which brought great joy, a joy that was lasting as they returned to Jerusalem

It doesn't matter that Luke seemed to contradict himself. Luke made his point by doing so. The ascension was, yes, the climax of Jesus work, but equally as essential it was the prelude to the Church's mission, that start of these past 2000 years or so, of God's work being done by the Church as the Body of Christ.

We are, in this time of our lives, Jesus' disciples. We are meant to listen carefully to the ways that Jesus speaks to US: through Church, our community, our personal circumstances, this pandemic time of our lives and this past week the horror of gun violence in Texas, and the continued unrest in our city.

So by Jesus' Ascension what are we meant to learn? That each of us is heading toward the completion of what we are meant to do? That we have been promised the Spirit and should be open to receive that manifestation of Love? That blessings are meant for us?

As Mass continues, and in communion we accept and agree to carry forth Jesus into today's world, may we deeply sense his presence, once again knowing that whatever we each can do, to make the world better, no matter how small it might seem, that is indeed our share in Jesus' work, and so it IS truly part of the Church's mission.

