

Feast of the Ascension Homily 2014

A teen once came up to me and asked if we could celebrate the Feast of the Ascension in a special way. I said, “What do you think we should do?” He said, “After mass is over, let’s go outside, release helium balloons into the sky and sing, “Up, Up and Away in my beautiful balloon. This is a very concrete but superficial understanding this feast when we celebrate Jesus ascending to His Father.

The scene in scripture is set: Jesus once again meets with his disciples Jesus on the mountain. We are told “Some still doubted”. N you believe that! Some still doubted. We should take courage that 40 days was still not enough time for some of his disciples to believe he is risen and with them.

What are we really talking about when we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord? We are talking about a very different way that Jesus will be present: no more will he have an physical presence, one you can touch and see and hear; no more will he appear to them as risen state; after his ascension Jesus is to be with them...and us... in a very different way?

We may get an insight into how he will be present by looking at how another person who has died and gone from our midst but still makes a profound influence on us. I am speaking of Mother Theresa:

After she died, Mother Theresa was honored not only her religious community, not only by Catholics throughout the world, but given a full funeral of a civic leader in India which is primarily a non-Christian people.

The effects of her presence are still very much with us. By the time of her death in 1997, the Missionaries of Charity, the community which she founded, numbered over 4,000—in addition to thousands more lay volunteers—with 610 foundations in 123 countries on all seven continents.

Her simple yet profound words filled books and became mantras for people worldwide, word like, “We must be poor like Jesus. His way of poverty was simple, He trusted His Father completely.”

Her greatest effect may well have been after her death rather than during her life as her community has grown and spread. Daughters of Charity now have a mission in Lansing and Detroit.

Jesus' ascension focuses on the fact that he is now physically gone from our midst. He is physically beyond us (like Mother Theresa) yet says in today's gospel, I will be with you always, even to the end of the world. Surely Jesus' presence has had a greater effect on our world after his Ascension than in the days he walked on this earth.

(Pause)

What should we do to celebrate this great feast of the Ascension with faith?

First, Jesus invites us "go out to all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He challenges us to go out into the Galilees of our every day lives and preach, teach and heal by word and example.

But secondly and surely most important, he invites us to "come up the mountain and pray with him. Before we go out to our world and share the Good News of Jesus, we need to be convinced that the Lord is risen, he is with us and his Spirit is working through us.

(Pause)

It is not surprising that Mother Theresa spent half the day in prayer to recall Christ's risen presence in her life. Remember her words: We must be poor like Jesus. His way of poverty was simple, He trusted His

Father completely.) We need to invite the risen Lord to be with us in our doubts and challenges.

Jesus said that our greatest work is to believe in the One who sent him. That is why Jesus brought the disciples up the mountain in Galilee. The mountain...the place to pray and to meet the risen Lord.

And so, what is the fullest way to celebrate this Feast of the Ascension? It is to come to the mountain and pray. I compliment you on being here today.

The need to come to prayer so essential to witnessing to the risen Lord in today's world. Yet praying today is so difficult activities to enter into today., reflects on why it is so difficult to form a rich prayer life in our American society today. I would like to share a long quote from Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, in his book, Prayer, Our Deepest Longing:

"[Our American society is] developing a permanent attention deficit disorder. What happens is that we never find the space in our lives to touch what is deepest inside of us and inside of others. Given the power of our culture, we can go along like this for years until something cracks in our lives --- a loved one dies, someone breaks our heart, the doctor tells us we have a terminal disease --- or some other crisis suddenly renders empty all stimulation and entertainment in the

world. Then we are forced to look into our own depth, and that can be a frightening abyss if we have spent years avoiding it.

Sometime we [may] need a narcotic But we have to know when it is time to unplug the television, turn off the phone, shut down the computer, silence the iPad, lay away the sports page, and resist going out for coffee with a friend, so that, for one moment at least, we are not avoiding making friends with that one part of us, that deepest part, that someday will accompany us into the sunset.

How do we best celebrate the Feast of the Ascension: Take time for prayer:

I would suggest three regular times for prayer: morning, before the rush of the day begins; evening, as life slows down; and Sunday, when we as a community of faith, take time to remember and give praise and thanks to the one who transcends and embraces all of life.

(Pause)

Jesus brought them to a high mountain.

He told them: Go out to the whole world

And then he said...remember, remember, remember I am with you all days to the end of the world. (walk away) Don't forget!