

Reflection for the Feast of the Ascension

This Sunday we as a people celebrate the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord. This Feast marks the fortieth day after Jesus rose from the dead and brought the hope of eternal salvation to all humanity. Recently in the last twenty or so years many Dioceses in the United States and elsewhere with approval from Rome have moved the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord to the Sunday following the fortieth day. This has been done with the intention to enable the faithful to be more able to celebrate this important Feast by attending the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

After Jesus rose from the dead, He led His disciples out to the mountain, He informs them that they are to go into the world and proclaim the “*Good News*” beginning in Jerusalem. Then He departed from them and ascended to Heaven, to His Father and our Father. Ten days following this event, counting from the traditional day of the celebration of the feast, is the Feast of Pentecost, the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit the birth of the Church. The Feast of the Ascension of the Lord is a bridge from the Resurrection of the Lord to the Birth of the Church.

It is interesting to note that two years ago on the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord the Gospel Reading was taken from the Gospel of Matthew 28:16-20 and recounts the fact that Jesus approached His Disciples and said: “*All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.*” Last year the Gospel Reading was from the Gospel of Mark and Jesus said to His disciples: “*Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents with their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.*” This year our Gospel Reading is taken from the Gospel of Luke and we hear what Jesus said to His disciples: “*Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with the power from on high.*”

Each of the Synoptic Gospels has an account of the Ascension of the Lord and each account has a different focus on the event that is recorded. In the Gospel of Matthew the account of the Ascension of the Lord has a focus on the Sacrament of Baptism and on the idea that the Disciples have a responsibility to teach. The Gospel of Mark also has a focus on the Sacrament of Baptism, but instead of teaching it mentions signs and wonders that will accompany the Disciples and all who believe in Jesus Christ. Finally the last Synoptic Gospel, Luke, does not mention the Sacrament of Baptism like the other two; rather Luke has a focus on the Disciples call to preach the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is also in the Gospel of Luke that Jesus mentions that they are to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit before they start their public ministry; this is not mentioned in Matthew and Mark.

This year on the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord, as we have our Gospel reading from the Gospel of Luke we are presented with the opportunity to be reminded of how important the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ is to our faith life. It is through this saving act that we can look forward to the forgiveness of our sins and to eternal salvation. Without the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, what a far different world we would be a part of. It is the death and resurrection, or for those who lived before the coming of Christ the promise of this saving act, is what transforms us and our relationship with the world and our God. It is this loving act of Jesus Christ upon the cross that totally alters our lives in this world, and provides us with the hope of eternal salvation.

In our Gospel reading this Sunday taken from the Gospel of Luke we hear not only of Jesus ascending to His Father and ours, but also of the Apostles being informed by Christ that they are called to preach to all nations the forgiveness of sins. This directive from Jesus to His disciples is often referred to as the “*Great Commission*”, Jesus sending his disciples into the world. This “*Great Commission*” is not just for the Apostles of the New Testament, it is a commissioning of all believers of Christ. Each one of us due to our baptisms are called and commissioned to proclaim the good news to all the Nations.