

Ascension Sunday, 24 May 2020

Scriptures: Acts: 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23; Matthew 28:16-20

Homily: Fr. Ken

In reflecting on the scripture narratives for this Ascension Sunday weekend, we could imagine the dialogue of the apostles. Jesus has spoken his final words to them, and ascended to heaven. The two angels are still there and they say to the disciples: "Why are you standing there looking at the sky? Go tell the world what you have seen".

One disciple could have responded: "He told us its not yet time! We're supposed to stick around for whatever's coming next". Another disciple could have said: "Why are we looking up? Because we don't know what's about to happen". Still another disciple could have said: "Where else are we supposed to look? We need to see beyond this spot where our feet are sinking into the mud of fear and confusion. All around us we see nothing but signs of all that went wrong in the past few months".

That dialogue is imaginary. But Luke's story does portray the tension between looking to heaven and getting down to Earth. Thinking about it, we can well imagine how unprepared those disciples must have felt for their mission.

In the second reading from the Letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul offers a description of the gifts the disciples needed to move forward. We hear the prayer: "May the God of our Lord...give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened that you may know the hope that belongs to his call...the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe". A perfect prayer for the hesitant and confused disciples.

That prayer is as much for us today in our time of the coronavirus pandemic, as it was for the disciples back then. The prayer begins by grounding us in our faith, reminding us that the will of our God and the Spirit is always for our good.

When the prayer asks for a spirit of wisdom and revelation, it opens us to the Spirit that gives us the ability to read clearly the signs of the times, to recognize how God is moving us forward through the people and events of our days. To pray that “the eyes of our hearts be enlightened” pleads for a divine vision, for a hope that will go further than all our collective imaginations.

We can celebrate the Ascension as an invitation to imagination that leads us to ask for such a blessing. We are invited to stand with the disciples who heard the promise, who knew they would not see Jesus anymore, but who were still charged with carrying out his mission.

Like the disciples, we must face the very real, dispiriting events of our own times, the circumstances that cannot and should not be ignored—the rise of populism in our age of anger.

We may share the disciples’ desire to simply stand, looking heavenward for a solution, but we will also hear angels or prophets who remind us that prayer is only one part of the solution.

If we have the audacity and courage to pray for the blessings of wisdom, revelation, knowledge of God, enlightened hearts and Christian hope, we will truly be impelled to action. The really good news is that Christ has promised that as we go to the ends of the Earth, he will be with us each and every day until the end of time.