

### **The Ascension of Our Lord**

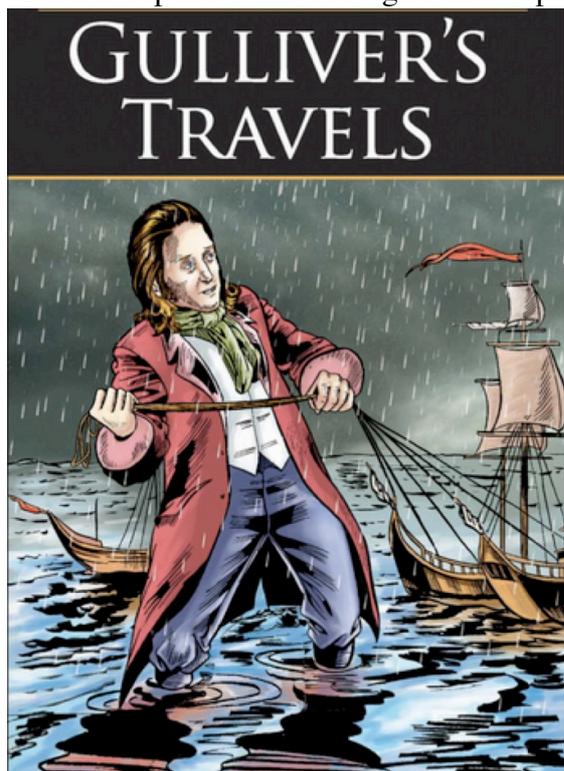
Cycle A, 5.28.17

Acts 1:1-11/Ephesians 1:17-23/

Matthew 28:16-20

### ***OUT OF SMALL DAYS AND INTO A GRANDER REALM***

The Ascension of Our Lord, so central to our faith, can easily be overlooked, yet this neglected mystery is at the core of who we are as Christians. In this mystery Jesus is the universal Christ. He came for the redemption of the world and all humankind. We have a future larger and more enduring than this world. We will last longer than the mountains, the sun and the stars. In Christ, now ascended to the Father, we share the very life and eternity of God. In his Spirit Jesus is as close to us as the beating of our heart. Our vision is expanded and our sights lifted up.



If you think back far enough, you may remember from your sophomore or junior English literature class reading Gulliver's Travels by Jonathan Swift\*. Swift was a seventeenth century essayist and satirist who used his writings to critique the politics and culture of his day

in Ireland and England. The book is written in four parts but most people only remember the first where Gulliver's voyage takes him to the island country of Lilliput. Gulliver is washed ashore after a shipwreck and finds himself a prisoner of a race of tiny people, less than 6 inches tall. After giving assurances of his good behavior, he's given a residence in Lilliput and becomes a favorite of the Lilliput Royal Court. He's also given permission by the King of Lilliput to go around the city on condition that he must not harm their subjects. What's not so familiar is the second part of Swift's book. There Gulliver has the reverse experience when he finds himself among the Brodingnagians who averaged 70 feet tall. He stood in a field of wheat 40 feet high, while a line of Brodingnadians approached wielding seven-foot sickles. Realizing that he could be squashed under foot or cut in two, Gulliver screams as loud as he could and one of the reapers stops short. He looked at Gulliver like we might view a tiny mouse, and he bends over, picks him up and holds him dangling in front of his eyes.

The Brodingnadians treat Gulliver gently as a curiosity. Eventually he was able to converse with their king and boast about England's empire and political insitutions. He failed, however, to realize that this gigantic king could evaluate all Gulliver said from a much higher vantage point. And so, far from being impressed by Gulliver's account of English hisptory, the king was appalled. To him it appeared to be nothing but a "*heap of conspiracies, rebellions, murders, massacres, revolutions, banishments, the very worst effects that avarice, faction, hypocrisy, cruelty, rage, madness, hatred, envy, lust, malice and ambition could produce.*" The king could only conclude Gulliver's countrymen "*to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth.*"



Well, this certainly embarrassed Gulliver, so he tried to impress the king with the achievements of European science and technology, inventions such as gunpowder and cannonballs. This too left the king amazed at *“how so impotent and groveling an insect could entertain such inhuman ideas.”* He then ordered Gulliver, if he valued his life, never to mention these things again while in his kingdom. Privately, Gulliver ridiculed the king’s reactions as shortsighted, forgetting that it was Gulliver himself who was short and therefore shortsighted in this land of kindly giants. We can only wonder what Jonathan Swift would write about our culture and politics today – how he might critique last week’s negotiation between Saudi Arabia and the United States to invest **\$110 billion** for the manufacturing and sales of weapons of war!

Today we celebrate the Feast of Our Lord’s Ascension. In our Creed we say of Jesus: *for us and for our salvation he came down from heaven.* We believe that Jesus came into our world possessing a

much higher vantage point from which he could well perceive how small we are and how small we often behave – our human pettiness and its dire consequences; our greed and the inequalities among people it creates; our self-centeredness and the isolation it produces when we forget about the wider world we share on this planet. Jesus came to unmask these limitations, to lift us up out of our myopia, to share with us his higher and more profound vision of reality, the greater expanse of his mind and heart, that peace which the world cannot give.



*And when I am lifted up from the earth,* Jesus says in John’s Gospel, *I will draw everyone to myself.* In the letter to the Ephesians today the author prays that we might receive a Spirit of wisdom, that the eyes of our hearts be enlightened, that we might understand the surpassing greatness of God’s power for us who believe. Jesus is the spiritual giant whom God placed as head of the Church, putting all things beneath his feet. Throughout the gospels we notice how Jesus often takes his disciples to a mountaintop – to pray, to deliver the Sermon on the Mount, to be

transfigured before them, to be elevated on his cross and finally to carry our gaze even higher as he ascends into the heavens themselves. He does this all in an effort to entice us toward a taller, wider, all-encompassing view of things.

So the Feast of the Ascension is critical to our understanding of the Christian faith because it marks A MISSION ACCOMPLISHED by Jesus, who fulfilled his heavenly Father's will. Just as significantly it gives his followers – you and me -- A MISSION TO ACCOMPLISH. We are sent to go out and tell the world the Good News of God's love and mercy for all people.

One of our parishioners recently published a very inspiring book of poetic reflections and blessings entitled May It Be - Growing a Genuine Life\*\*. Her writings invite the reader to aspire to one's higher self. I thought that some excerpts from the section entitled "Vistas" would make a fitting conclusion to our celebration of the Lord's Ascension:

May you climb to higher ground  
where vistas inspire  
and expanses invite.

May you scramble  
over impulses  
to resist,  
to complain,  
to waste,  
to stay in the muck,  
and elevate yourself  
to where growth grows,  
movements move,  
and thoughts expand.

May you explore  
what's next,  
what's just,  
what's true.

May you find happiness  
in the climb

and beckon others to trek  
out of small days  
and into a grander realm....

May you stand tall  
when the urge is to cower.

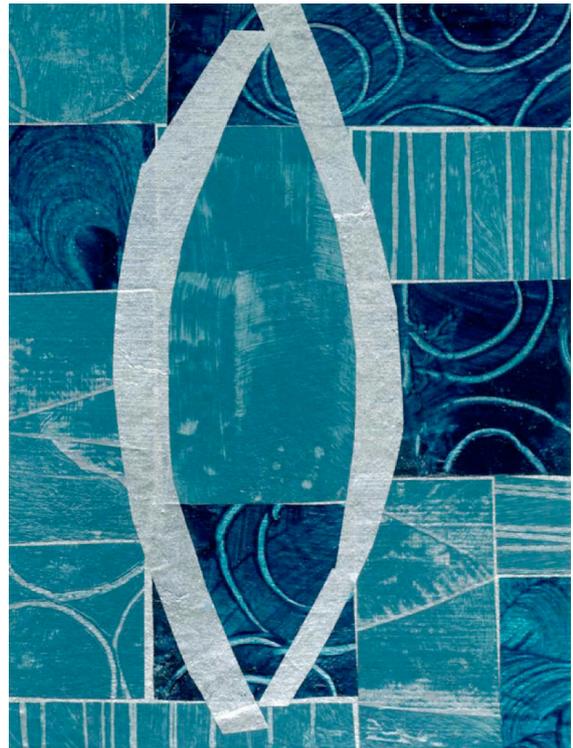
May you shine  
when your light feels dim.

May you speak loudly  
when critics hope you'll whisper.

May you blossom  
when defamers expect you'll wither.

May you resist the inclinations  
to hide,  
to shrink,  
to slump.

May you rise.



*Fr. John Kasper, OSFS*

Inspiration taken from:  
\*Living the Lectionary:  
Links to Life and Literature, by Geoff Wood

\*\* May It Be – Growing a Genuine Life  
By Chrissa Ventrelle