



Some reflections inspired by online copyrighted commentaries and homilies

**May 16, 2021**

## **Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord**

We celebrate today the feast of the Ascension of the Lord. The Lord's ascension marked the end of that period during which the risen Lord was visibly present to his disciples. This entailed an experience of loss for the first disciples. It was not as painful as the loss they had experienced when Jesus was crucified. On the third day after the crucifixion, the risen Lord appeared to them. He spoke to his disciples, as he had spoken to them before his death; he ate with them, as he had eaten with them before his death and explained to them that he had to return to the Father in order to be glorified. And that the father would send an Advocate.

Throughout the next few weeks their sorrow of Christ death gave way to joy in the Resurrection. Their despair to hope, their fear to courage. Yet, even this wonderful period during which they saw the risen Lord also had to come to an end. They had to learn to let Jesus go again. The struggle to do that is captured in today's first reading. As the risen Lord takes his leave of them, they were staring into the sky. This scene is always fascinating to me. The Apostles standing there looking in the sky, after Jesus just told them he has to go and what they are expected to do. It calls to mind the experience of people at an airport seeing off their loved ones. They keep their loved ones in view until it becomes impossible to see them any longer. When you look into their face you see the longing for them to stay a little longer and the joy of having visited them and send them off safely. Yet, the disciples' experience of loss at the time of the ascension of the Lord was very different from that feeling of saying goodbye to loved ones. The experience of loss at the time of his crucifixion is in the past, Jesus was no longer dead; he was alive with a new life, and he promised that he would come back to them in and through the Holy Spirit.

In this morning's first and second readings he tells them, 'you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you'. The Lord would be with them in and through the Holy Spirit. Yes, he was leaving them, but it was in his leaving that they would experience Jesus in a new presence. In the second reading, He will be received in glory and take his rightful place seated at the right hand of God. He is transcended back to the father from which he descended. He now receives all the power, authority and dominion of the universe. He now has the power to work in us through the Spirit to build his church on earth and in the heavens.

That is the real meaning of the feast of the Ascension. We celebrate today the many ways that the Lord works with us, as we are sent to be disciples to one another. It is not so much a feast of the Lord's departure but a feast of his active and life-giving presence among us. As people of faith, we can get discouraged by the decline in faith today, which finds expression in so many ways. Yet, today's feast reminds us that the Lord never stops working among us. When it comes to the work that flows from faith, we may get tired and discouraged, but the Lord never tires.

As Saint Paul reminds us in today's second reading, the risen Lord has given us a share in his own grace. He keeps on bestowing his gifts upon us, different gifts to different people, so that, as individuals and as a church, we can become fully mature with his own fullness. Today's feast calls on us to keep on receiving from the Lord who is always giving to us and is always working among us so that his vision for human living continues to be proclaimed.