



May 29, 2022

Eastertime—The Ascension

*'May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you may know
the great hope to which he has called you...'*

Ephesians 1:18



Dear Friends,

The founder of Hassidic Judaism, Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer lived 1700-1760. He was born in a small town in the Ukraine. This area suffered from frequent pogroms and messianic movements (in times of extreme difficulties people look for saviors). 'Pogrom' is a Russian term for a violent riot incited with the aim of massacring or expelling an ethnic or religious group particularly Jews. Pogroms were instigated by the Christian Czarist Russian Empire. (Similar dynamics are at work in the current conflict in the Ukraine. History doesn't repeat but it often rhymes.)

After a rather ordinary early life Rabbi Israel began to travel the region, performed wonders, and proclaimed the presence of God in the ordinary things of life. He taught that in every moment, and everything we do is a spark of the divine. Our job is to discover the divine, and the call to holiness that lies within the ordinary. This responsibility should be carried out with joy. He called prayer a window to heaven and the world a "house of prayer." He said, *"The world is full of wonders and miracles, but man takes his little hand and covers his eyes and sees nothing."*

Rabbi Israel was given the nickname the *Baal Shem Tov*—"The Master of the Good Name" or the "*Besht*" for short. He taught with a spirit of joy. His sense of the holiness of existence inspired a following beyond the "Hasidim" (pious ones) as his followers were called. On May 22, 1760, as the *Besht* lay dying he said, *"I am not worried at all for I know that I am leaving through one door and entering through another door."*

Today's celebration of the Ascension of Jesus proclaims that Rabbi Jesus has left through one door (his death) and entered through another door (his resurrection and ascension). He enters the new reality we name the reign of God. Jesus assures us that all he went through was necessary for the release of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit enables us to see the divine all around.

The Spirit gives courage to face with confidence the inevitable difficulties that challenge us. That confidence is born from hope. We are empowered to see the glory of God. We know the outcome of history. The one who ascended to the new reality we name God will return. We are filled with joy because we have hope.

The violence of this past week in the mass shootings in a grocery store in New York State, a Church in Orange County California, and the school in Texas are related to fear—fear of the other, fear that my group is no longer in control, fear that I might have to change. Fear leads to terrible things. Demagogues like to gain power over others by stoking our fears. Fear sells—from smoke detectors to automatic weapons, to national stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction. Fear kills.

Pope St John XXIII, lived through the horrors of World War II, the holocaust, and the threat of nuclear war during the 1962 Cuban Missile crisis. Yet in that same year in an address to the Second Vatican Council he wrote, *"We feel that we must disagree with those prophets of gloom, who are always forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world were at hand. In the present order of things, Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations, which by men's own efforts and even beyond their expectations, are directed toward the fulfillment of God's superior and inscrutable designs."*

The Resurrection and Ascension challenge us not to consult our fears but to look to the hopes and dreams of Jesus for our world. May the Holy Spirit open our eyes to the joy and hope which is ours in Christ Jesus!

Christ is Risen!

Fr Ron

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