

The Ascension of Our Lord
May 28, 2017

There are two aspects in today's celebration of the Ascension. The first, obviously, is celebrating Jesus' rising body, soul and divinity into Heaven. The second is the disciple's response to this amazing event as well as what our response will be.

Getting down to the actual mission of the disciples is an essential aspect of today's message.; it kind of reminds us of the transfiguration when Jesus told Peter that they didn't have time to camp out on the mountain, there was work to do and a whole lot more they had to learn.

We can even use our religious imagination to create an alternative scene at the end of the Ascension story. For example, what if one or two of the disciples had the nerve to answer back when the angels spoke? After all, speaking back to angels would not have been out of the question. After all, at the very beginning of Luke's Gospel, Mary questioned an angel — and so did Zachariah with less positive results.

One of them might have said, "He told us it's not yet time! We're supposed to stick around for whatever's coming next." Another might have had the courage to say: "We're looking up because we're afraid and confused and we have no idea what's about to happen!"

And we can even imagine Mary Magdalene was with the group. After all she had encountered angels before at Jesus' tomb and she understood better than anybody that she couldn't cling to Jesus, so she could have encouraged the others by saying: "Come on guys, I know you can't just take it from me, but he said he would remain

with us ... Don't you get it? This is just like when Elijah went off in the fiery chariot ... he left Elisha with a double dose of his spirit. So, for once, let's try doing what he told us!"

While that whole scenario is imaginary, Luke's Ascension story does portray the tension between looking heavenward and getting down to earth. And it's easy for us to imagine how unprepared those disciples must have felt for their mission. Because we might feel the very same way.

Fortunately, our second reading from the Letter to the Ephesians offers a description of the gifts we as disciples need to move forward. In today's reading we heard 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."

It's a perfect prayer for anyone who desires to become authentic disciples of Jesus but don't know what to do!

That prayer begins by grounding us in our faith, reminding us that the will of God the Father, "our Lord," and the Spirit is always for our good. When it asks for a "Spirit of wisdom and revelation," it opens us to the Holy Spirit that gives us the ability to read the signs of the times, to recognize how God is drawing us forward through the people and events of our days.

To pray that "the eyes of our hearts be enlightened" pleads for the ability to see the world and as God sees the world, for hope that will go further than all our imaginations put together.

Today we can celebrate the Ascension as an invitation to ask for such a blessing. We are invited to stand with the disciples who heard the promise, who knew they wouldn't see Jesus anymore but who were still charged with carrying on his mission.

Like them, we must face the very real disheartening events of our times, the circumstances that cannot and should not be ignored. We may share their 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 equation.

If we have the courage to pray for the blessings of wisdom, revelation, knowledge of God, enlightened hearts and Christian hope, we will have all we need to answer the call to discipleship.

That's why it really is good news for us is that The Easter mystery is celebrated in three manifestations: the rising of the Lord from the dead, the ascension and return of the risen Lord to the Father's right hand in heaven and the gift of the Holy Spirit to fulfill Christ's promise that he will be with us always.