

Reflection for the Feast of Ascension

I'm going to give a homily *Live on Sunday Morning*. This reflection is my preparation for it. And it may bear tacit likeness to it. This, however, stands on its own and comes from my heart.

Are you looking forward to Divine Savior's closing at the end of June? Are you excited about our three local parishes uniting to form a new one? Most likely you're not. We're having our heart ripped out. What has been the mainstay of our religious life will be no more. We will remain a site for worship until around Labor Day. This year, that's September the Fifth and, by the way, two days after my sixty ninth birthday. That's like getting underwear, as a kid, as a birthday present. This is our reality. We accept it, like the underwear, with a terse thank you; and not in a note.

It is also the reality for the folks at Our Lady Mother and Saint Eugene. Their sites will remain open, though. Why is it us that must close? Logistics and real estate. We have a lot of land and only three buildings on it. Check the satellite images of us on Google Maps or Google Earth. This location is a pretty rich nest-egg. Think of it as our first gift to our new parish that we form. It will help to allay the repair costs of the other two sites. Yes, the other two parishes need as many repairs as we do. Our Lady Mother's site will be reevaluated in a year. If our merger falters and communal, spiritual and financial renewal fail, It will close too. There is a lot at stake. I think we can agree.

Perhaps knowing this can help our commitment to the process. And in the hope of success, we can find our dedication to Christ in his Church. What about our feelings. I feel them too! This is scary! This is painful! This has been home! For me, the latter is literal. I live in the rectory and these people are closing the parish out from under me. Could anger and outrage be our feelings too? Are they saying, "Good job folks, but not good enough?" Could this feel like failure? As a priest? As a congregation? As a Church? It sure feels like it! We are the mother parish for the other two! This feels unfair!

Before I get carried away, let's stop and take a breath.

There's a lot of power and excitement in these feelings. They are, however directed inward. Poor little old me. Self pity will get us nowhere if we live by our feelings. But wait; we are people of faith. We have gathered together Sunday after Sunday, faithfully. What has that done? Our gathering has built our church. Our gathering has strengthened the bonds between us. Our gathering has fed us with God's Word and the Eucharist. The Holy Spirit has deepened us through all of this. We may have thought that we've done all of this for God, but God has done it all for us. We have lived our faith in this Parish only through the grace of God. Thus we can live by faith and not our powerful feelings. Those will drag us down. Where can God's grace through the work of the Spirit lead us?

Some times our celebrations of the Easter feasts, like today's Ascension of Jesus to the Father can blind us to the human experience of them. Jesus rising to heaven as the angels flit upward with him is an over powering image. Forget the special effects! They obscure what's really happening here. Listen to what Jesus actually said in Acts and in the gospel. He spoke of

salvation, the forgiveness of sin and the Church's mission leading to the kingdom of God. What really happened to the disciples was not the glory of God.

Jesus left them – alone. Think about that. They had their heart ripped out of them. Their leader, teacher and savior was gone and for the second time. Jesus had died on the cross; death is the end. But wait; Jesus rose from death alive! They had a reprieve; there was hope. But now, on this feast, Jesus was finally gone. What were they to do? They experienced all the feelings we have as our heart is ripped from us! Did they flounder? Did they fail? Of course not; we wouldn't exist as a faithful Church if they had. We're going through what they did. What of those yet to come? How will the Holy Spirit work in us?

That's a good question. Can we answer it? I was a kid when Divine Savior was founded. In the early 1960s I would drive out here from the North Side with my parents to visit my mom's god mother, who was Sister Mary Christine Lentsch, OSF in the newly built convent. Were you one of the founders? Didn't you revel in the excitement and hope for the future? We can grieve and still have hope now. Remember what those days were like, the days of our youth. We face the same possibility now! We have faith and that's all the apostles needed; they fulfilled their mission, for here we are. We are fulfilling ours now and a new, possibly powerful experience awaits us.

What did the Eleven have? They had the Spirit of Jesus within them. They had each other and with those gifts, they built Christ's Church. None of them got out alive, but they, Like Jesus, live in us. What was most important, they trusted in Jesus' Spirit; they trusted each other. In our situation, I trust you!

We have sixty seven years of experiences, presence and commitment. We have been gifted in so many ways. As members of the founding area parish we will bring our individual and collective gifts with us. Hell, I'm going too. At least you know how long my masses last. In fact, our heart has not been ripped out of us. Last I checked, mine's still beating and so is yours. Jesus never left the disciples alone; he left them his spirit. His spirit is in us too; a source of joy and hope amid our grief. We move forward, together to a new parish and toward the kingdom of God.

Can anyone say Amen?

James D. Beath
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FIRST READING: Acts of the Apostles 1:1-11

A reading from the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles:

In the first book, Theophilus, I dealt with all that Jesus did and taught until the day he was taken up, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them by many proofs after he had suffered, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While meeting with them, he enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for "the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak; for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be

baptized with the Holy Spirit.” When they had gathered together they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He answered them, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight. While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven.”

The word of the Lord.

Responsorial: Psalm 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9

God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord.

All you peoples, clap your hands, shout to God with cries of gladness, For the LORD, the Most High, the awesome, is the great king over all the earth.

God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord.

God mounts his throne amid shouts of joy; the LORD, amid trumpet blasts. Sing praise to God, sing praise; sing praise to our king, sing praise.

God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord.

For king of all the earth is God; sing hymns of praise. God reigns over the nations, God sits upon his holy throne.

God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord.

SECOND READING: Ephesians 1:17-23

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians:

Brothers and sisters: May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, 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 what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might: which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens, far above every principality, authority, power, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: Luke 24:46-53

+ A reading from the conclusion of the holy Gospel according to Luke:

Jesus said to his disciples: “Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” Then he led them out as far as Bethany, raised his hands, and blessed them. As he blessed them he parted from them and was taken up to heaven. They

did him homage and then returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple praising God.

The Gospel of the Lord.