

The Ascension of the Lord

Reading 1, Acts 1:1-11

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.”

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

R. (6) 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.

R. 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.

R. 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.

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

Eph 1:17-23, Reading 2

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.

Lk 24:46-53, Gospel

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.

Last Thursday was a special day not just because we celebrated the feast day of Our Lady of Fatima. It also marked the 40th day after Easter Sunday and so we join together today to praise Jesus in an ancient celebration, the Ascension of the Lord. Amid shouts of joy, Jesus was enthroned in Heaven in both His divinity and glorified humanity. He overcame our human weakness and death to reign over all creation. The Scriptures today tell us that God loves us so much that He enthroned Christ in Heaven and promised that we would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. We should stand in awe that while He left us physically, we don't live without Him as we wait for His return. We have the power of the Holy Spirit with us and we become His witnesses to the ends of the world. Together we are His new body, the People of God, the body of Christ, the Church.

Today another ancient feast is celebrated; today is the Feast of St. Brendan the Navigator, the patron of our community in Atlanta. Let me tell you a little bit about him. Brendan was born in 484 AD in Ireland (4200 miles from Haiti) and lived to be nearly 100 years old. He was an abbot who is as famous in Ireland as St. Patrick is because he led a monastery with over 3000 monks, and he sailed in a leather and wood boat with 17 monks to find the Promised Land of the saints. After a 7 year journey they returned to Ireland with some fantastic stories about visiting an island full of sheep, seeing giant crystal pillars, being bombarded by fiery rocks and passing through an endless dense cloud. Some say they discovered America 800 years before Columbus did. It wasn't until 1976 when Irish explorer Tim Severin led a team that built a boat with a wood frame covered with ox hides and then sailed 4500 miles. The explorers discovered an island full of sheep, the Faroe Islands; they saw giant crystal pillars, the huge icebergs floating in the ocean; they passed by the volcanoes of Iceland which as we know in recent weeks have launched burning rocks; and they encountered the dense fog zone at Newfoundland's Grand Banks just north of what is now the United States.

But why would anyone take such a journey, especially 1500 years ago? Brendan and his monks climbed into a tiny boat to brave the North Atlantic Ocean because they knew

that other monks had made these kinds of journeys before. It was a leap of faith, but Brendan's monks were explorers who expected to return from their journeys stronger and with lessons they could teach others.

People have asked why we make the trip from Atlanta to Bassin-Zim, Haiti...it is about 2700 miles round trip...that's about ½ of St. Brendan's 4500 mile voyage. St. Brendan and his monks knew that Jesus was talking to them, so they did what He commanded.... and we are doing the same. In these last 7 years that the people of Our Lady of Fatima and St. Brendan's have known each other, I think that we have been responding like St. Brendan's monks...we may have doubted what we could do, but with a leap of faith, we have worked together and are now stronger because of it. We have learned lessons that we have shared with each other, like recognizing that because Jesus is at the center of our lives, we are one community who actively share His love and joy. And we will continue to grow as we continue to share God's love with each other.

Before Jesus ascended to Heaven, He took our human weakness and transformed it with His authority and might. He empowered us with the Holy Spirit and then He told us to spread His Good News as members of His new body, the Church.

God loves us so much that He includes us in His plan. Now that's a scary thought. You and me are responsible to carry on His plan. I could easily doubt that. I could give you a hundred reasons why that wouldn't be possible. But, we have not been left alone. Jesus is with us...His Spirit is in us...He feeds us with His body and blood at every Mass, and we come away filled with His peace and joy. We won't fail if we put Jesus at the center of our lives. We will do great works in His name building up His kingdom one-on-one, you and me.

The words of the responsorial psalm today said it well: *"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....Sing praise to God, sing praise; sing praise to our king, sing praise."*