

Ascension 2018
05/13/18

Here we are, approximately 40 days after Easter. But if you think it's that simple to determine the specifics about the timing of this event, you are mistaken. For instance, Fr. Joe Robinson says that if we think the Ascension was an historical event, we will be very confused, especially if we try to figure out just where and when it took place. Matthew does not tell us when Jesus ascended, but he does tell us Jesus ascended from Galilee. John, on the other hand, seems to tell us that the Ascension occurred most probably before Jesus appeared to the Apostles on Easter Sunday night.

Luke tells us in his Gospel that Jesus ascended from Bethany on Easter Sunday night, but in his second book, the Acts of the Apostles, he tells us Jesus ascended from the mount called Olivet, which is pretty much the same as Bethany, but a full 40 days after Easter.

And, finally, there's Mark's Gospel. He tells of some of the appearances of Jesus found in Luke and John. Mark focuses on faith and baptism and the healing powers Jesus gave to the apostles. But Mark does not tell us when the Ascension took place. We heard today of the heavenly glory to which Jesus returned as He directed the Apostles to preach the Gospel to the whole world. And when it comes right down to it, that's the lesson we are to take away from the event, not when and where it happened.

Msgr. Ralph Kuehner tells of a woman named Stephanie graduating from high school; now her daydreams turned toward living on the wings of freedom. She found a job with some decent income, and she moved out from home. The evening before her move, her family gathered for one more meal together.

As they sat down, Stephanie found a small gift wrapped in ribbon and bow at her place. She opened it and found, to her bittersweet amazement, a pair of apron strings – cut. Everyone laughed, yet everyone knew the meaning of what had just taken place.

Kuehner goes on to suggest that, for some, the passing of the baton comes early in life, as when new parents realize their responsibility to form the infant life placed into their hands. For others it comes later, when one's profession imposes increasing expectations or when tragedies or illness or premature death replace dreams with demands, or perhaps simply when one grows into the realization that there is no other generation ahead to accomplish life's work.

Msgr. Kuehner concludes by saying that, when we celebrate the solemnity of the Ascension, we celebrate more than Jesus' return to the Father and our severance from spiritual apron strings. It's a reminder that the power Christ lavishes upon our imaginations can outmaneuver the trickster side of demons, calm the rolling shadows of disease, serve as an antidote to the sort of poison that deadens not only the life in our bodies but also the light in our eyes.

Let me finish with a couple more thoughts from Fr. Joe. He suggests that where Jesus has gone is where He wants to bring us. Jesus didn't come to this world just because he was bored with being in heaven and needed something else to do. He came to us and took on our human flesh for only one reason: to take us to Himself and to share His life with us.

At the Last Supper, Jesus told us: "I am going to get a place ready for you and I will come back and take you with me so that where I am you also may be." You see, our real home is not in this world, as much as we may love our homes. This earthly realm is temporary – our home is to be with God.

Today's feast is a lesson about not getting too attached to our present lives. When life is comfortable, we don't like to see things change. That was true of the apostles, too. The apostles didn't want Jesus to leave them, but He challenged them to move from a comfortable familiarity with Him to a new way to be with Him. He challenges us in similar ways. Life never stays the same; events, even tragic and unpleasant ones, disrupt our lives and force us to change. But if we stay one with God, we shall one day share His glory. And isn't that why He created us in the first place?