

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

The Ascension of the Lord | For Sunday, June 2nd, 2019

Up, Up, and Away?

Written by Rev. Mark Suslenko

Acts 1:1-11

Ephesians 1:17-23

or Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:19-23

Luke 24:46-53



It is common thinking to believe that Christ's Ascension into heaven somehow removes him from earth and that the Holy Spirit becomes some kind of substitution for his presence here. The Holy Trinity can never be divided and always exists in relationship with each other, whole and intact. How, then, are we to think of this event we celebrate? If Christ is now fully glorified and ascended into heaven, how can he still be here?

St. Augustine says: "Why do we on earth not strive to find rest with him in heaven even now, through the faith, hope and love that unites us to him? While in heaven he is also with us; and we while on earth are with him. He is here with us by his divinity, his power and his love. We cannot be in heaven, as he is on earth, by divinity, but in him we can be there by love." God, in all of the fullness of the Holy Trinity, transcends heaven and earth and time and space. He is present to the past and the future as much as he is to the present. We touch the undivided, intimate presence of God when we live the virtues of faith, hope, and love. These virtues flow from the essence of His being and connect us intimately with Him.

As important as it is to "look up" to God, it is even more important to look within and look without. Our world, and even our Church, finds itself out of focus and losing touch with their compass and true north. While there is a lot of good happening around us and sacrifices are made every moment, there is also a great deal of dysfunction and evil. Our true "reason for being" is distorted and conflicting, and often harmful voices are competing for our attention and allegiance. The tyranny of the politically correct is reigning supreme, and less regard is given to what is true and essential.

This is why, at its core, this celebration of Christ's Ascension into heaven propels us to look within to the virtues of faith, hope, and love that God has given us and look without and get about the business of preaching the Good News. What, essentially, is this Good News? It's quite simple: we are hardwired to be in relationship with God eternally in heaven, and we can share in God's heavenly glory while we journey on earth. Humanity needs to learn to connect the dots and realize that the very things it relies upon so often each day (faith, hope, and love) are not there because of its own doing or simply because it comes with the package. Faith, hope, and love exist because of God's generous self-gift.

Christ is not further removed from us but more fully and inwardly connected. The author of "[The Cloud of Unknowing](#)" tells us that the work of contemplation is "an interior vital adventure pursued in the Spirit." The Ascension does not direct us to simply look up and fix our gaze upon the heavens but to embark upon this wonderful, exciting interior adventure in which we find ourselves more and more intimately linked and connected to the Ascended Christ through the timeless virtues of faith, hope, and love.

This adventure leads us not only to the incredible Trinitarian intimacy of God's presence but to our brothers and sisters, our own blessedness, and the world we have been asked to manage. Have you ever found yourself wondering what all of the tensions and conflicts we are experiencing in our world and in our Church are saying about where we have come as a people and where we are going? How do you find yourself answering that question?

With Christ's mission now complete, God's message to humanity is echoed loud and clear. New life awaits all those who desire it! God never gives up on creating and recreating all that He has made and sustains. As dire and dead as things may seem, there is always new life to be found. The temptation is to live in the frustration, anger, fear, disillusionment, apathy, hopelessness, and even despair. Some may even believe that the human race has gotten to the point of no return. Today, however, we are asked not to give up! We are commissioned once again to be witnesses to the truth, and the Holy Spirit will help us accomplish our goals.

What has the risen and ascended Christ done for you? Take your answer to that question and bring it to others, not necessarily by using words but by the example of your life. If the true light of faith is shining within you, people, by the work of the Holy Spirit, will be drawn to you. If you have really discovered a pearl of great price, others will want one, too. We cannot give up on humanity, and we cannot give up on the Gospel.

When the Risen Christ saw the disciples that last time, he did not leave them with a specific set of instructions, intricate formularies or prayers to say, or condemnations to meet out to those who have erred. He kept it simple: preach in my name. It is our task to help people come to true repentance by adjusting the focus of their lives, reorienting their compass, and discovering the heavenly presence of Christ by following the virtues of faith, hope, and love. Then, humanity will no longer be wallowing in the darkness of destruction but living the ascended life that God has promised.

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PRAYER

O God unto whom all hearts lie open
unto whom desire is eloquent
and from whom no secret thing is hidden;
purify the thoughts of my heart
by the outpouring of your Spirit
that I may love you with a perfect love
and praise you as you deserve. Amen.

— [The Cloud of Unknowing](#)