

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

The Ascension of the Lord | For Sunday, May 24, 2020

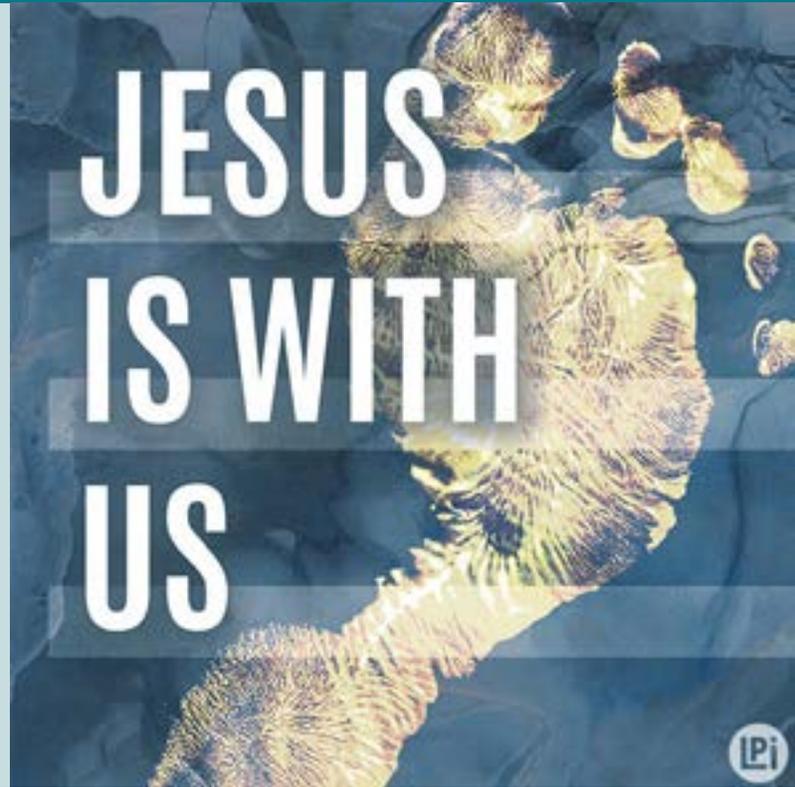
Hide and Seek

Written by Br. John-Marmion Villa

Acts 1:1-11

Ephesians 1:17-23

Matthew 28:16-20



When I was younger, I remember going to a friends' house to swim in their pool during the summer months. All the parents were on the deck, enjoying the company, while the kids were splashing around gleefully in the pool. Once in a while we would play a pool game, called Marco Polo. It's kind of like the game hide-and-seek, but in a pool. I never really liked playing this game, especially when I was Marco because I was afraid of never being able to find anybody while blindfolded in the pool. My fear was, for most part, often unfounded, but nevertheless it arose time and again when we would play this game.

I remembered this childhood event while I was meditating on this feast of the Ascension of the Lord. It had struck me as odd for the longest while that Jesus himself would say that he was going to go away. After all, he had risen from the dead recently so it's not like he couldn't stick around for as long as he wanted. Even while trying to meditate on the second decade of the Glorious Mysteries of the rosary, I had a hard time trying to understand why this is a significant event in the life of Jesus. And when I was on pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2017, we found ourselves in a small church which has a marbled footprint on the ground, commemorating the last step of Jesus as he was lifted up into the sky. I was still confounded.

Maybe through a stroke of creative imagination, or inspiration, I decided to thumb through the pages of the Song of Songs in the Bible. It's only eight chapters long and provided for me a much-needed insight in understanding this feast a little more deeply. It's clear from a

reading of the text that there is a sort of hide-and-seek game going on between the lovers. But it is also clear that the desire of the beloved increases in her search to find her lover, whom she thinks she has lost. And this single idea was so helpful as an interpretive key to help me understand the feast of the Ascension because it is almost as if the Lord is playing a game of hide-and-seek with us, because he knows that, in his temporary absence, the desire in our hearts will grow and intensify.

Perhaps many of you know this feeling because of what the coronavirus quarantine orders have done ... since many of us are not able to go to church, we might feel lost or even abandoned by the Lord. All the creative measures that priests have come up with during this season are helpful, but it's nothing like being able to go to the church, sit in the pew, alongside other members of the community, and celebrate the Mass. While that day is hopefully soon in coming, it is clear that our desire has grown and intensified during these months that we have not been able to go to church. It's kind a like a game of hide-and-seek, but with one significant difference. In the game of hide-and-seek, or as in the Marco Polo game of my childhood, there is a fear of not being able to find the others. This is not the case with our relationship Jesus. We don't need to always look on the outside for him, because he already lives within us. Because of our Baptism and Confirmation, we are made temples of his living presence. When we love others, especially sacrificially, Jesus is with us. When we read the text of the Scriptures, Jesus is with us in his Word. When we share in healthy Christian fellowship with others, Jesus is also there.

I have one more 'secret' to share: if we look at the feast of the Ascension in light of next week's feast of Pentecost, we see that Jesus has not really left us as all! Our Baptism and Confirmation ensure sacramentally that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are with us always (Mt 28:20). St. Paul even says, "Who can separate us from the love of Christ Jesus?" (Rom 8:35). So, while it may seem as though Jesus is hiding from us, he really is never farther away as we are able to open up our hearts to his presence already living within. Maybe all we need to do is close our eyes, breathe deeply, and learn to recognize the Divine Presence in our hearts amid the jungle of strong emotions, sharp thoughts, and enflamed passions.

Br. John-Marmion Villa

PRAYER

Lord,
help me to get comfortable in the quiet,
still moments.
Show me the importance of stopping
and removing distractions
to spend time in Your presence.
I don't want to talk over You but
help me to discipline myself long enough
to hear what it is
that You have to say.
Amen.