

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

The Ascension of the Lord | For Sunday, May 29, 2022

A Crisis of Identity

Written by Fr. Mark Suslenko

Acts 1:1-11

Eph 1:17-23 or

Heb 9:24-28; 10:19-23

Lk 24:46-53



It's all out of control. Inflation, the economy, violence, oppression, greed, morality, and tensions are all escalating as people scurry about for a sense of stability and well-being. Power seems to win the game and self-aggrandizement appears to be the order of the day. Love gets watered down to tolerance and accepting whomever and whatever is presented. The axis around which meaning and truth are found is twisted. Human beings appear to be engaged in an identity crisis of vast proportion, not certain whether standard, acceptable, and appropriate protocols exist any longer. We are lost. When one nation feels entitled to the goods of another and feels justified using any means possible to obtain them, we are in trouble.

While this is happening most explicitly in Ukraine, there are other parts of the world where greed, exploitation, and violence are regular occurrences. Even in the United States, violent carjacking and general theft are becoming common place and a blatant disregard for human life seems more evident. We often act as if our journey of life is simply a random occurrence, that we are here on this planet for no known reason and accountable to no one. Norms and protocols, appearing to cater to personal preferences, become a matter of what protects each other's rights and space. Benchmarks and standards for growing, maturing, perfecting, and refining human thought and behavior no longer exist.

The world needs the Good News of the Ascension of Jesus Christ. Pope Francis tells us, "The Ascension does not point to Jesus' absence, but tells us that he is alive in our midst in a new way. He is now in the Lordship of God, present in every space and time, close to each one of us." If God is present in every space and time, then he is actively involved in what is happening in our lives. He works through both the positive and negative experiences we encounter, bringing us to a renewed and more focused place. The Ascension allows us to see this truth about ourselves and it enlightens our hearts. Christ, who was most perfectly, vividly, and brilliantly transfigured before the very eyes of the disciples will be our destiny.

Faith brings resolution to humanity's identity crisis. Faith corrects our misunderstandings of love. Faith seeks non-violent solutions to humanity's many conflicts. Faith removes our self-focus and deepens our vision. Faith provides the benchmarks we need to properly grow and mature. Faith provides the centering axis we need to order our lives. And only faith can give us real hope. Perhaps the cause of humanity's identity crisis is nothing other than an absence of faith. How can we believe that God takes a real interest in our lives if we do not believe in God in the first place?

The answers to all that plagues us are not easily found. However, before we can even think of repairing and constructing, we need to have solid plans and build a secure foundation. The Ascension reminds us of who God is, who we are and who we are meant to be. All we must do is believe in what God promises. In this way, we acquire our anchor for proper self-knowledge and a benchmark for judging actions.

When people are so angry, hurting, displaced, confused, and broken it is hard to convince them that there is a better way. The rise in addiction and mental health issues are indicative of social structures that are failing. When the inability of society to care for a child who is unwanted justifies the right to take that child in its mother's womb something is incredibly wrong. It is only faith that can tell us, without doubt, who we are. Any decisions made without that secure and foundational reference point are subject to serious error. There is no doubt that our lives can become unsettled and empty. When we rely too much on the things of this world to please us, we can easily lose our excitement, enthusiasm, wonder, and joy. No worldly thing, no matter how great, can satisfy the longing of a human heart. Only God does that.

Imagine how different life would be if everyone approached each moment as a creative opportunity to see what God will do. When encountered with faith, even darkness has great potential to become light. The neighbor who gets under our skin, the demanding coworker we see every day, the person at the supermarket who is rude to

us, the elderly person we met on our daily walk who seemed so disheveled, the perfect sunrise that greeted us in the morning, and the wonderful aroma and taste of our first cup of coffee can all be used by God to awaken us, humble us, and bring us to a heightened sense of His presence.

If people really understood the power of faith, they would have a better sense of who they are and where they are going. It would be harder to take something from someone that doesn't belong to us, strike out in vengeful violence when we are hurt, allow greed to override the basic sanctity of human life, justify behaviors that are blatantly sinful and wrong, give in to the whims of desire and passion, and live life as if we are the only ones that matter. The world needs the Good News of the Ascension of Jesus Christ. Do not be reluctant to preach and accept the truth! Christ is our destiny and our hope. It's that simple. Alleluia!

Fr. Mark Suslenko

PRAYER

Loving God,
often giving into temptation and weakness,
we forget that You alone are God.
Help us to avoid greed in all its forms,
seeking satisfaction from things
that are passing and being indifferent
to the cries of those who suffer pain.
May we allow the Gospel
to teach us that all human life is sacred,
that everyone has a right to a place
in Your world and that the desire for peace
resides in every vulnerable human heart.
We offer You, Most High and Glorious God,
the pain of our war-torn and hurting world
and entrust to Your care those who have lost their lives,
those who grieve for them and
those who have to leave their homes to be safe.
Inspire those with power to see that violence
is not the path to peace and to pursue resolutions
to conflicts that respect human dignity.
Loving God, hear all of our prayers
and those in hearts throughout the world
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

(Fr. Mark S. Suslenko)