

[Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47; Eph 1:17-23; Luke 24-46-53]

You are standing in the airport terminal, looking up as the plane rises. You are on your front porch, waving to the taxi as it pulls away. You look out the review mirror as you pull away to see your new college student looking homesick already. You are the last person walking away from the casket as you leave the cemetery chapel. You might think to yourself, “Great! What are we gonna do NOW?” Have you ever had that reaction to someone who has left us, who is going to be away from us for a while, who might even be away from us for good?” We needed that boss, that pope, that bishop, that pastor. We needed that dad, that mom, that child. That brother or sister. I needed that job. I needed that employee. “Great. What are we gonna do NOW?”

What do we do when our plans, our security, our lives suddenly change, and we realize it will never again be the same? We welcome, we receive and we are open to the Holy Spirit that Jesus promises us He will send us. That promised Spirit will show us the way, give us strength in times of weakness, hope in times of fear or anxiety, and deeper meaning to life in all situations.

Believe it or not, Jesus was limited here on earth by His physical body. After His ascension into heaven and the sending forth of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ can be and IS with us today – in the Seven Sacraments, in the way WE proclaim the Gospel, and in the myriad of ways we give witness to Him by our actions, our ministry and our service.

Pope Francis reminds us that the Ascension does not point to Jesus’ absence, but tells us that He is alive in our midst in a new way. He is no longer in a specific place in the world as He was before the Ascension. He is now present in every space and time, close to each one of us” (Pope Francis, General Audience, April 17th, 2013).

As we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord, we think not only about the last moments of Jesus' time among His disciples, but also of the beginning of their task as preachers of His word.

From the night of the Last Supper through His arrest, trial, torture and crucifixion, they had suffered fear, cowardice, guilt and confusion. With Christ's Resurrection and His appearance to them, they knew that everything He had said was real, and that He Himself was the Truth. In the glory of Jesus, Son of God and of Man, they experienced mercy and compassion. "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" (Luke 24:50-52).

His Apostles and other followers must have experienced a natural sadness that their cherished Lord was departing from them. Yet the wonder of knowing that He was the Son of God and Redeemer of the world... that He has chosen them as the first members of His Church... and that He was sending them out to invite others into a personal relationship with Him, filled them with happiness. It is a joy that is open to all of us who embrace belief in Christ our Lord and offer it to others.

"Taken up," the word that we translate as "Ascension" comes from the Greek verb *anapherein* (to go up, to be carried up) which suggests a progressive action, but is in the passive form. That means that someone else is doing it, and it's still going on right now. God is doing it. And it's happening to us right now!

So, "What are we gonna do NOW?" May you and I be in a constant process of being "carried up" into heaven by the Father Who loves us, by the Son Who teaches us, and by the Holy Spirit, for Whom we await a great outpouring of grace on Pentecost Sunday. May we realize that the glorified Jesus is not away from us, but beside us, and within us, leading us to our Eternal Home. Let us pray for all of today's missionaries as we recall the first followers of our Lord to spread the faith. We can also give them material support by contributing through the annual Missionary Cooperation Plan to support the Piarist Mission. AMEN!
ALLELUIA!