

## St Pius & St Anthony Homily Ascension Sunday Year C1

Today is the Feast of the Ascension and our first reading and gospel give us a glimpse from two angles of the picture scene of Jesus rising in glory (one from Acts of Apostles and one from Gospel Luke): Jesus raises His hands, He blesses His disciples and then rises and rises and rises ..... until He is out of sight. The detail of Jesus' **"raised hands"** sticks with me (I ask, "were they cupped upward or cupped downward-either direction, they both represent a gesture of blessing- upward signifies having and giving something to us, or if downward they signify bringing down to us or embracing, holding or protectively covering us.) But whether the hands are cupped upward to heaven or downward toward His disciples, His arms raised make us all look up. It reminds me of the old game we kids would always play when bored in the classroom, and out of the blue, you look up at the ceiling and then a second student looks up, and then a third and so on like a wave until finally the teacher stops it by calling everyone to put their noses back into the books. Or maybe when you are talking with someone and they jerk quickly and look at the door, and you ask "Do you gotta go, or are you telling me that I need to go?"

A couple years ago I went through a phase of loving to read everything I could get my hands on about Leonardo Da Vinci, his art and painting style. A little detail he included in several of his major works of religious art was that a holy figure would have their arm raised with a finger pointed upward (like a sign to the viewer). The figures include John the Baptist, another time it is St Anne, and Thomas in his most popular Last Supper scene. That raised hand and finger pointed upward, seems to be Leonardo saying, "Look up, look beyond, look deeper into this-there is more for you coming" (Of course, Leonardo is an interesting guy,- his paintings often include another common detail that perplexes me-I tis of rocky-mountainous backgrounds Why? I'm still studying that one: we see it most in his painting called "Virgin of the rocks", the Mona Lisa, the Virgin w St Anne, and even faintly out the back window in his Last Supper scene again?) But the raised hand of John Baptist highlights John's messenger role of pointing out Christ- So is Leonard telling us, like the angels in Acts 1:11 who redirect the apostles to go back to prayer and wait for the Spirit's coming as they kept looking up in sky, after Jesus ascended? The raised hands and pointing us upward was a gesture telling us to keep our eyes open, more is coming from above, a higher plane is opening so be watching for it. We rise, too?

I find that the Ascension of Jesus (today), and next Sunday's descension of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost) exhibit a natural progression, maybe circular, of Jesus' faithful presence to us, in a different way, different manner of experiencing, but

the same faithful Jesus who is always with us. Jesus hinted at this in His Last Supper teaching, when He told the disciples about the coming days, John 16:16, *"A little while and you will no longer see me, and again a little while later and you will see me."* That threw the apostles for a loop! If talking about his death and resurrection, those same words also apply to His second rising that we call the ascension to heaven: First he rises in glory from the dead and then he rises in glory to be seated right hand of the Father in heaven. And it all needed to happen. Jesus had even said '**It is better for you that I go**' (John 16:7) .

Why is that? Well, at that same last supper, Jesus had also said, John 14:19 *"In a little while the world will no longer see me, **but you will see me**, because I live and you will live."* Jesus is saying that despite any physical changes, "I am always going to be with you, maybe you see me go-rise, but I will still be with you in a new way, in a new form" He was preparing them for a change in his manner of being present with them. He is saying, "I am right here now", AND "I will still be right here with you but in now through the Holy Spirit"

I find a great coherence; an internal necessity to what Jesus is saying; that He must ascend in glory to the Father, and return **in spirit** to His church to be with His people everywhere. (Keep in mind too what he had told the woman at the well in John chapter 4: she had questioned whether God could only be experienced in Jewish Temple of Jerusalem, or their on Samaritan Mt Gerizim. Jesus told her the day was coming when God (Him) would be experienced anywhere by a worshipper 'In spirit and truth'( John 4:21, 23)

Again, the dilemma is that before Jesus' ascension, and the return descension of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is always pinned down or 'localized', oriented in a particular place and time. For example, someone asks, "Where is Jesus?" and people argue, "He is at the Temple" "No, He is at Capernaum", "No it is Bethany". He can't be in Galilee, if he is in Jerusalem. Even his title name fixates him physically such as the designation "Jesus of Nazareth" Yet Jesus came for all-He is a universal Savior. So, by ascending to Father, and returning through gift of the Spirit, He can be everywhere-Jesus is able now to be equally present, to all times, all places, all ways. Simultaneously omnipresent to us all. Maybe we can compare His Holy Spirit presence as the difference between having a physical courier dragging along & delivering envelopes of inter-office memos to mailboxes, versus

Simply hitting the 'send button' with a 'Reply All' function or a group text- it simultaneously delivers to everyone, instant real time. That is Jesus' Presence now.

Consider the confusion among the apostles after Easter morning, in those first resurrection appearances: Some said, 'We saw him on road' Others said, "We had meal with Him at Emmaus." Mary Magdalene said, "I saw him at the tomb garden". Others said, "He was on the seashore with us" and even others, "No He was right here with us in the upper room". The ascension and the return descension of the Holy Spirit solves the problem of fixating Jesus' location and the potential disintegration (tearing apart unity) of Jesus' mission into only local issues.

So He ascends in glory and sends back His Holy Spirit to draw together and keep 1) His followers united and 2) keep his mission alive. Jesus as our universal savior, is universally present (in Spirit) not held/bound to this or that particular place-locale. Through the return of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is able to be available to all persons everywhere. That is more than physical presence; it is Spirit- which opens up next week's feast of Pentecost, confirming Jesus' presence among his disciples , and activating his mission command to now led by the Holy Spirit of Jesus, to go out, beyond Jerusalem, out to Judea, on through Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ***To All the nations, Everywhere!***

An account of the Ascension Story is recounted in Luke 24:50–51, Acts 1:9–11, and in Mark 16:19-20 "So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs."