

St Pius & St Anthony Ascension Sunday Year B2 (

Today celebrates the Feast of Jesus' Ascension, or His 2nd rising. On one level, it makes perfect sense that He had to ascend into the glory of Heaven, because He came to have more than just a localized effect. (He didn't come just to save Galilee, or just to save Judea- No, He came for a universal mission to save all the world). His command directive (mission instruction) to the apostles is just that: "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8), or in Matthew 28:19 "go to all nations...the world over." So He would have to ascend in glory and return in Spirit (Pentecost) to be universally accessible, omnipresent in all places at all times. To describe God as omnipresent, makes me thin of how that is often symbolically represented in artwork, with God having 'eyes all over' (Revelation 4:8 says just that-covered in eyes to see all directions). *We can think of Jesus' ascension as giving Him that 'overseer' position (this used to be reflected in old classic Catholic Church architecture, when there was a dome over the sanctuary-altar, and up high in the center of ceiling circle was an eye-depicting God as all present-all seeing.*

Jesus' ascension brings that point home, that nowhere is out of view or off screen to Jesus – He is for everyone, anywhere. He is not just pinned to Nazareth or to Jerusalem. No, he is everyone's savior everywhere. Crime shows are so popular anymore, like SWAT, FBI, Law/Order Organized Crime, and almost every episode has this scene, when a hostage event/terrorist attack develops, and a boss in a command center yells, "I need eyes-Get me eyes", meaning he/she wants a tap into a surveillance feed or a camera inserted into the building. Well, by ascending, Jesus always has eyes on us –present to all believers everywhere And since this is Mother's day, I want to put a plug in for the omnipresent vigilance of moms. My mom used to always say, "You all behave, I have eyes everywhere." She had networks of snitches, in the neighborhood and school yard. And was it nuns, who used to say, they had eyes in the back of their heads? I remember feeling like I solved a mystery in Geometry class one time, when I figured out how Sr Mary Leon could call out back-row note passers or spitballers, with her face to the chalkboard doing long math ('Craig get back in your seat').It wasn't eyes in back of head, it was the side-glance view to the wall of windows that reflected like a mirror for her! But thank God today for Moms (and our nuns)!

But with the Ascension - What a smooth and subtle exit for Jesus? The gospel (Mark 16:19) simply says, "he was taken up into heaven..." But the first reading Acts 1:9 adds, "he was lifted up, and **a cloud** took him from their sight....." Acts introduces clouds, which wouldn't be the first time (the Transfiguration story Luke 9:34 has clouds introduced to allow for the slipping out exit of Moses and

Elijah, leaving Jesus in center stage as the clouds dissipated). I understand this experience to be like the billowing curtains at a show being pulled shut (an end or only an intermission). The curtains just provide the blank canvas for you to process what you just saw and to reset your imagination.

Of course, that opens the door to a possible problem of us getting stuck daydreaming and looking skyward, like the apostles did at the ascension and needed the two angelic men to redirect them (maybe like we all did back on April 8 with the eclipse – times when everybody was just staring upward or last two nights with the Aurora Borealis (and tonite still if you missed them). Fine, watch it, gazing upward, but then we have to return to work or focus again on right here, which is why the angels intervene to ‘direct’ the apostles to now get to the work commands Jesus just delivered – Stay in Jerusalem, Pray, and Spirit will come to lead you in universal mission of Kingdom.

We might ask here, “How else might this ascension scene, have gone down another way?” Well Luke does have another scene where Jesus appeared and conversed and then ‘poof’, but then ‘he vanished instantly’ (*Luke 24:31-“their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight”*). Yet, such a ‘pop and he’s gone’ exit, led to a frantic reaction and run back to the other apostles for those two disciples, and I think the outdoor appearance and exit with Jesus’ ascension is differently smooth and subtle (like a ship fading into the horizon), not meant to shock them, but to calmly assure them that he will be back (trust that- the angels say it too). And to stay in place – remain in Jerusalem for the Spirit’s coming.

I love how Luke offers a wonderful parallel to how He starts his gospel and his second volume the Books of Acts. In both they have opening scenes of people looking up. Remember the shepherds in the fields seeing a multitude of angels in sky announcing “Christ is born in Bethlehem-Go and see’ (Luke 2:8-14). And then here in the start of the Book of Acts, we have Jesus ascending, the apostles looking up skyward, and again angels (men clad in white) announce to them commands (Acts 1:9-11-directions on what to do-‘stop looking up and get to what Jesus called you to do’).

Speaking of parallels in Luke, here in Acts 1:3, Luke tells us that Jesus remained 40 days after resurrection until the ascension teaching and giving proofs to apostles. That neatly mirrors Jesu’s own training and incubation period by the Spirit in desert 40 days before He inaugurated His public mission in Nazareth (Luke 4:1, 14). So this intense training period with the resurrected Jesus, and the additional ten day period of prayer/waiting for the Spirit’s return was their needed boosting before take off into Jesus’ worldwide mission of evangelizing

and ushering in the Kingdom. That will be Pentecost, our feast next weekend! I suggest that Jesus example of the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus, was His stamping a Template for all Evangelization (befriend strangers along the Way, offer hospitality – feed hungry & shelter homeless – and the Kingdom spreads Matthew 25:34-35). Jesus sends back His Spirit to us for the purpose of sharing the Kingdom one interaction at a time, not just in Jerusalem, not just in Rome, but anywhere and everywhere that Jesus' name is shared and His life is taken up again and again in service and ministry.