

St Pius & St Anthony Homily Ascension Sunday Year A1

The Ascension has Jesus rising again, until He is out of view! When is the last time you stood and stared up at the sky? How long did you stand there? What pulled you back down to earth? I hear a great line in our first reading: “Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky?” Now they had just seen Jesus fade off into the highest clouds (maybe like watching balloon release and you see them grow smaller and smaller until they disappear into vanilla skies). I figure they are shocked still and probably processing what they just went through. But apparently like deer in headlights, they are just standing there looking up and up..... I did that recently: I had my own sky-staring episode recently. Last Wednesday on the 5:00 pm weather segment of local news, I heard that it was a great evening to view the International Space Station fly over, at about 11 minutes after 9:00pm (*and that it would be visible for a whole 4 minutes-when usually it is just for one minute or less*). I thought, “I can do that” (I had dedicated some time a couple years ago to such a sighting and I remember the silver reflective box like object flying quickly across the sky, so I thought I could refresh that memory!) So, last Wednesday night, I was out standing in the yard a few minutes after 9:00 to start looking up. And watching, somewhere around 9:12 I think I saw a moving light crossing the sky, and said to myself, “Yeah, there it is”. It wasn’t as exciting as I thought. But then as it seemed to go across, something else caught my eye, and I said, “No, there it is” as it was a brighter something showing up crisscrossing the first light’s path. And then I saw another something smaller, but definitely reflecting light while moving, (and then even more, I saw a blinking red and green something- yet I realized it was much, much closer to earth like a plane). So, end of story, I am not sure if I saw the space station or not last Wednesday-yet I looked up for more than 15 minutes at the sky. But if you are interested, apparently there is a dedicated NASA web site, “Spot the Station”. Just enter your zip code and it will show a time nearly every evening that there is at least, a minute’s worth of good night-viewing time as the station passes over (I think it moves at 17, 000 mph- every 92 minutes orbits the earth). But there I was, I guess for a while I was star-struck, staring and staring up at the night sky. And in the first reading, which tells the fullest version of the Ascension of our Lord, we see the apostles stuck in awe, still looking up, so long that afterward, that it takes two men in white garments

(no, not in 'white coats' giving out free jackets to try on-no, these are angelic visitors who redirect the apostles back to their earthly calling-they are not hallucinating-this is real) these white garmented men, wake up the apostles from their trance, and remind them that, Yes, Jesus will return. In the meantime, they should get back to there work for Him, and now their work is to stay together & pray, opening themselves to the Holy Spirit's coming (next week).

When I hear about these two men in white ('higher ups' I call them) who bring the attention of the apostles back down to earth, I think of my old boss Eddie, back at my college airport job in Owensboro where I worked during college summers. We often got distracted by the military aircraft that came in for landings, whether it was the planes that performed touch and go's on the runway, or the swarms of choppers that would land in the field (refueling maybe). We would stop and watch, And Eddie had the good habit of calling us back to work action, by saying to us after we got distracted, he'd motivate us, to get back to work, saying 'That ditch won't weed-eat itself', 'Those runway lights aren't painting themselves', or "Those toilets might flush themselves, but they sure don't clean themselves-get to it." So, I understand this post-ascension scene of Jesus in just that same way: the two men in white, remind the apostles to get back to work, and that their work at that time was to keep praying and staying together until the return gift of the Holy Spirit comes to them.

So, today we celebrate the Ascension of Jesus into glory, His being seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. Many people ask a question about this faith event: "Just why must there be an ascension?" Or asked another way, "What does it mean, really, that Jesus ascended in glory?" My first response to such a question is that the apostles questioned this too. In John 14:5 & 8, Thomas and Philip asked Jesus about '**where, how and what now**' after Jesus first talked about going on and leaving, or as He said it, "not being seen for a while" (John 16:16). Jesus basically comes back at them (really, we know He does) saying, "I go, to prepare, and you will be eventually led to where I am" *(I like how nearly everything that Jesus said at the Last Supper in John chaps. 13-17, applies not only to Him preparing His apostles for his death and resurrection first, but it all applies forward also to His preparing the apostles for His ascension-a 2nd rising- and the Holy Spirit's coming-Pentecost, too.)*

In John 16:7, Jesus actually says, "*It is better for you that I go.* For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." So, Jesus' own word is that it is divinely ordained that He go-ascend, and the Spirit

return to confirm His ever after-eternal presence with us. But also, I find an ‘intrinsic necessity’ to Jesus ascending away ahead of us, to the Father’s House. In For example, before Jesus ascends, we always have a geographical problem with Jesus being ‘limited’ to one physical location. As Jesus’ ministry is recorded in bible, there are times when Jesus is clearly in one place and not in another. He is ‘geo-fenced’ or fixated in only one place at a time, so how can He be available to all of His followers- as He had said, “I am with you always”? Perhaps the preeminent example of this limitation, is at Lazarus’ death, both Mary and Martha lament to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (John 11:21,32) *(John 10:40 earlier told us that when Lazarus died, Jesus had left the Jerusalem area being hotly pursued for persecution by the Temple priests/ Pharisees so he moved to the area across the Jordan River-definitely not around Bethany)*

Or in John chapter 7, when Jesus sent the apostles up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, He purposefully stayed behind (He ends up going, but not for a while), John 7:11 says “The Jews were looking for him at the feast and saying, “Where is he?”. Jesus couldn’t be in Jerusalem and in Capernaum at the same time. Or Mark’s gospel deals with the problem of Jesus’ location being pinned down and His isolation to a fixed place, right at the beginning of his gospel chapter 1. Mark 1:37-38 has the apostles telling Him, “Everyone is looking for you.” And He told them, “Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come.”

So, I suggest that Jesus’ ascending and the return via the Holy Spirit, is the solution to the problem of being ‘location fixed’. He can’t be in Jerusalem when he is in Nazareth. He can’t be in Samaria, while he is in Judea. Therefore, since he is our Universal Savior, and had come to save all people, he is not to be identified only with one geographic area. We heard even in today’s gospel, how he commissions His apostles in Matthew 28:19, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” Watch for next weekend’s reading to name all the nations known that represent all people, and all locations. So, by Jesus ascending and sending back to us His and the Father’s Spirit, Jesus becomes omnipresent, ubiquitous and all pervasive, everywhere all the time accessible for us! So, His Ascension and Spirit ensures that Jesus’ words to us remain true. “I will be with you always” (Matt 28:20). Wherever we are, it doesn’t matter, He is our universal Savior of all everywhere!