

St Pius & St Anthony Homily Ascension Sunday Year B

What is the connection between Resurrection and Ascension and Pentecost? Well, it amounts to the introduction of Jesus' wingman. Really, the Holy Spirit ('Wings-Man'). We have the wonderful prayer to the Holy Spirit.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful. And kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you will renew the face of the earth. Lord, by the light of the Holy Spirit, you have taught the hearts of your faithful. In the same Spirit, help us to relish what is right and always rejoice in your consolation. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

The Holy Spirit gets us through or bridges us between times.

Resurrection to Ascension (recall that Jesus appeared in John's gospel 20 resurrection morning Jesus breathed on them....) and then Ascension to Pentecost. I find such a parallel between what Jesus says right before His death-resurrection and right before His ascension-Spirit-gifting at Pentecost. In both cases, Jesus is preparing His disciples for a change in the winds (Spirit again). All of his Last Supper speech applies just as well to the events of change that happen at His second leaving (first death-then ascension). Jesus tells them 'I am still with you, but now a little differently'. He says it in several ways, 'I am not leaving you' 'you will not be orphaned' 'though you see me not-I am with you' (in John 14:3, 18, 28, 16:16). Jesus-God is faithful, He doesn't really ever leave- just goes forward with us in a new form, new way, new manner- He says, 'Let me introduce you to the Spirit-Spirit will confirm my presence.'

What about the two mysteries in the Mystery? 1) Why did He need to ascend? 2) What did he 'TEACH' in that 40 day period?' First, why did it need to happen? As always, we follow Jesus and He addresses this at Last Supper when he says in John 16:7 "*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.*" Also even Resurrection morning, Jesus brought up needing to ascend when talking with Mary Magdalene. She had assumed it was business as usual post-resurrection, & that 'everything was same as before resurrection when he told her "Stop holding to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father (Jn 20:17). It is like he says we can't freeze time- Jesus was telling her not to cling to past known material experiences- which brings up exactly the issue of the inner necessity of His ascending in body and descending back in spirit.

It stems from the limits of time-space boundedness: that a universal mission and message meant for everyone needs simul-casting –real time presence everywhere (which we did hear that in His command today in Mark 16:15 ‘Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.’) Good Question: Jesus, how are you going to be known/experienced (here now) in every possible location world-wide? Not in the current physical humanoid form, as a body recognizable as we’ve been accustomed to like when we ate dinner with you in Jerusalem, or fished with you in Sea of Galilee (if he is in north Galilee, he can’t be in south Judea if he is Palestine, he can’t be in Greece or Macedonia). How will Jesus be omnipresent, unless He bodily ascends and returns in Holy Spirit. And He does. Which is all why he said ‘I must go-it is better for you that I do’ From now forward, You will experience me in Spirit by prayer (*more on that in just a second, because that is his primary focus from his resurrection to his ascension*), in my word remembered and shared, and in my work you do in my name.

The Ascension means overcoming this body-space limitation, and I think we can find examples even now, if we imagine how different media work (a medium or mode of communication). The Holy Spirit transcends geographic boundedness. Think of it like me getting a message out-old days you open a rolodex and start making phone calls 1, 2 3.....Well by the time of call # ten, he/she is always going to be upset because call #3’s word will get to them before my own-I’m hurt why didn’t you let me know; later the possibility of conference calls helped a little (still major limits) yet think of the advantage of a true instantaneous group mass email- one message out to all simultaneously- this is something like the advantage of Holy Spirit over any pre-Ascension encounter between Jesus and his disciples. Jesus suggest even this in Luke 17:23-24 when he was asked how he may come back. He tells them, *“people will say to you, ‘Look, there he is,’ or ‘Look, here he is.’ Do not go off, do not run in pursuit. For just as lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be.”* Jesus’ return to an individual’s believer’s heart is like the way the a mass crowd gathered can all feel the warmth/light of the same rays of sun simultaneously- feel the same ambient rays from same source at the same time . So we can sense why Jesus needs to ascend in body and descend back in spirit among us—which I think brings us to the first reading from Acts in which Luke

mentions what happened between resurrection and ascension (but frustratingly not in detail)-he says Jesus '***gave instructions through the Holy Spirit***' then in Acts 1:3-4 said, "He presented himself alive to them by many proofs after he had suffered and ***speaking about the kingdom*** (for 40 days) and 'to wait for "the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak." What are these instructions? Did I miss it? 'When did we hear of this promise of the Father or what about the ***content*** of the 40 days of extra teaching?' I suggest that since it is not spelt out like his teaching from sermon on the mount or his final discourse at Last Supper, that what he is teaching in this 40 day period is how to stay in contact with Spirit through prayer—like a practicum or clinical on prayer alone. Not a lot of words recorded but actual life in the Spirit practiced. Pray, pray, pray. I suggest that this additional teaching of Jesus after resurrection until ascension was not like specific moral teaching (do this, don't do that), but was more a type of 'spirit training-prayer training' way of being with Christ, not doing with Christ or drawing grace from him before all this work out here in the world. Not lectures about Christ, but just simply living with Christ.

Jesus had taught this primacy of prayer before work acts earlier too, but I am sure that in his physical presence, the disciples focused more on his actions and conduct like 'have the people sit down' 'bring the blind Bartimaeus to me' get those loaves and fishes, fetch a donkey, prepare the Passover room' I suggest his disciples fixated on these physical directives of activism instead of engaging deeper with Him in meditation or liturgy. Jesus had witnessed good prayer practices to them such as going off alone, of sitting in silence, of praying on mount. He added simple verbal prayer like His own Lord's prayer or when he commended the poor tax collector who just showed up to Temple praying under his breath, 'Lord be merciful to me a sinner' (*Don't think Jesus couldn't multiply words in prayers Himself as does in almost whole chapter 17 of John-He could.*) But I find that his 'instructions' from Resurrection day until Ascension, are about the necessity of prayer (as link-connection-bridge) to stay in touch with Him in the Holy Spirit. This period is not about concrete actions or works, but rather the simple gesture of opening ourselves to God, by giving Him time (sit with God) asking for and waiting for the Holy Spirit.

How do we know the Holy Spirit has come in prayer: Well, that is Pentecost so more on this next week- so we wait and pray this week like the apostles in that first novena (novena's are scriptural!) but we will know the Spirit when He comes, by His gifts and fruits: Gifts of Wisdom, knowledge, Understanding, Counsel, Piety, Courage and Fear of the Lord. And the fruits are charity, generosity, joy, gentleness, peace, faithfulness, patience, modesty, kindness, self-control, goodness, chastity. We watch for them, pray for them and wait for them.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful. And kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you will renew the face of the earth.

Lord, by the light of the Holy Spirit, you have taught the hearts of your faithful. In the same Spirit, help us to relish what is right and always rejoice in your consolation. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.