

The Ascension of the Lord

We are celebrating the Mass of the Ascension of the Lord in the oldest of our Parish churches. The church of St. James the Less here in Macclesfield was blessed and opened in November 1867. There has been something like seven generations of Catholics who have gathered here to celebrate the Eucharist and receive the Sacraments. This has been a place where countless people of faith have come to be in the presence of their God. Among them was St. Mary of the Cross MacKillop.

Over these last two months we have been forced to think differently about how we come into the presence of God. We have been unable to gather in our churches to celebrate the Eucharist. We have learnt that the Jesus we see becoming present at a Mass that we are watching on a screen is the same Jesus who is present with us in our homes. We have been in communion with him in prayer and in communion with others who are watching the same Mass. At times that has not been easy for us to really believe.

Today's gospel is from the very end of the Gospel according to Matthew. It tells of the moment when Jesus gathers his disciples around him for the last time before he leaves them. But we soon come to understand that the Risen Jesus is only leaving his disciples in the

physical way that they were able to see him. He assures them that is going to remain with them forever. "And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time."

Knowing that Jesus was going to be with them, they could accept that Jesus was commissioning them to make him present to others. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Today we can thank God that we are among those who have been drawn into the heart of our God through our baptism. We share the very life of the God made known to us by Jesus. We make that life present to others.

The presence of God is a very strong theme in the Gospel of Matthew. At the beginning of the Gospel we hear the angel say, "They will call him 'Emmanuel', a name which means God is with us." In the centre of the Gospel we hear Jesus say, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." And here at the end of the Gospel we hear Jesus say, "And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time."

The mystery of how Jesus is going to remain with his disciples is revealed in the reading from the Acts of the

Apostles. All through the Easter season we have been reading from Acts. Today we go right back to the beginning of the book. Luke explains that for forty days Jesus had shown himself alive to his apostles after his Passion by many demonstrations. “When he was at table with them, he had told them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for what the Father had promised. John baptised with water but you, not many days from now, will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.” It will be this gift of the Holy Spirit that will empower the disciples to become witnesses for Jesus. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth.”

I think it is good to remember that it is the Holy Spirit that is at the heart of our Church, inspiring all that we do and all that are. It is the Holy Spirit that unites us to one another. Together we share the life of God. Together we make God present to others. We listen for how the Spirit leads us. We hear the Spirit speaking to us through the Word of God that is proclaimed for us. We take that Word to prayer and ponder what the Spirit is saying. The Spirit is especially present to us in the leadership of our Church. We see that so clearly in the leadership being given to us by Pope Francis.

On Monday morning we will have a new leader in our own local Church that we call the Archdiocese of Adelaide. Patrick O'Regan will be installed as our new Archbishop. We can be confident that he is only with us because the Holy Spirit has chosen him to be the servant leader of our Church here in Adelaide. We can be confident that with our prayers and our support he will continue to be open to the ways that the Holy Spirit will guide him and help him to be a good Bishop. He has been called into leadership for our sake so that we may more easily recognise what we need to do to be Church in this place.

St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is a wonderful blessing prayer that we can pray for our new Archbishop. But is also a prayer that we need to hear being prayed for each one of us. “May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a spirit of wisdom and perception of what is revealed, to bring you to full knowledge of him. May he enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you can see what hope his call holds for you, what rich glories he has promised the saints will inherit and how infinitely great is the power that he has exercised for us believers.”