

Ascension of the Lord

Do we sometimes find that we have not thought something through until we are asked to explain it to others? Do we sometimes hear ourselves saying, “Well, I haven’t really thought about that; but now that you ask me,” and then go on to explain how we feel about whatever the question was.

Today’s gospel reading follows on from Jesus chastising his disciples for not believing the women who told them that Jesus had risen and had appeared to them. But what is surprising is that immediately after Jesus tells them off, he sends out these apostles to proclaim the Good News of his resurrection to others. It is almost as if Jesus is saying that you who found it so hard to believe will become believers as you tell others about my resurrection. You will grow in your faith as you tell other people about me. Does that ring true for us? How many parents would say that it was only when they started to hand on to their children what they believed that they really understood and claimed for themselves what they had been taught. When any of us talk to others about our relationship with Jesus, then we come to a deeper understanding of his relationship with us. Faith grows as we share it with others. Faith deepens as we try to live it.

Today’s celebration of Jesus’ ascension into heaven is very much a celebration of Jesus continuing presence in our lives and in our world. In Mark’s account of the Ascension we are told that Jesus was taken up to heaven and at the right hand of God took his place there, “while the eleven, going out, preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that accompanied it.” Jesus was no longer physically present with them, but his spirit, his life, his power was at work in everything that they were doing in his name.

Just like the eleven, we too are being sent out by the Lord to proclaim that Jesus is risen. But of course we don’t just proclaim the risen Jesus by what we say. Jesus wants to be at work in us in everything that we do. St Paul reflects upon this in his letter to the Ephesians. He implores us to lead a life worthy of our vocation. “Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together.” Paul then reminds us that Jesus has given us all a share in his grace. And we use that grace by exercising the different gifts that we have been given by God, gifts that are used in the service of others. I think we sometimes forget that gifts are given to us so that we can use them for the sake of others. We use these various gifts so that “the saints together make a unity in the work of service building up the body of Christ. In this way we all come

to unity in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God, until we become fully human, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself.”

We probably don't think very often of our faith in Jesus making us fully human. At times we are made to feel that we are the odd person out when we reveal that our faith in Jesus is important for us. People can't understand why we would make the celebration of Sunday Eucharist such a priority in our lives. They cannot understand that we would take the trouble of writing to our local member of Parliament urging him to vote against the assisted dying bill. But we know that it is our faith in Jesus that allows us to be able to see our world in colour and not just black and white. With the eyes of faith we can notice where God is. It is our faith in Jesus that helps us to see those around us who need us and then gives us the strength to reach out to them with compassion. We know it is our faith in Jesus that helps us to keep forgiving those who cause us harm.

On this day when we remember that Jesus ascended into heaven, we can be very grateful that Jesus came down from heaven to share fully in our humanity. It is in Jesus that we can now see the perfection of our humanity. His unselfish love shows us all what we are capable of. His deep compassion opens our eyes to what compassion can be. His complete dependence upon his Father shows us

how to live as created beings. Jesus shared his life with us so that we can live as sons and daughters of God. We can only be fully human when we live in communion with the God who made us.

Pope Francis has made a deep impression upon many people in our world who say that they have little or no faith in God. People listen to what he says because he touches human hearts by his deep humility and his ability to relate to other humans in a human way. They may not know where his wisdom comes from, but see him as someone fully alive, fully human, who can speak on behalf of all people. Pope Francis shows us what St. Paul is talking about today: “In this way we all come to unity in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God, until we become fully human, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself.”