



Sunday 12th May 2024

The Seventh Sunday of Easter

Gospel Reading

John 17.6-19

⁶ ‘I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸ for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹ I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹ And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵ I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Other Readings: Acts 1.15-17,21-26 Psalm 1 1 John 5.9-13

Homily

Jesus’ prayer for the disciples in John’s Gospel underpins new knowledge that they have of God. Jesus knows that the disciples may feel left behind, bereft, after the Ascension. “I am no longer in the world,” he says, “but they are.” So, he asks for protection for them. But not protection from fear, or persecution or any such things. He asks for protection for his followers “so that they may be one”, and, in their unity, demonstrate the loving unity of God.

Today is the Sunday after the Ascension, and although it comes toward the end of Eastertide, the Ascension is most closely related, in meaning, to Christmas. At Christmas we celebrate the Incarnation, God becoming flesh and living among us. At the Ascension, this resurrected

body of Jesus became for all eternity a part of who God is. The life of a single, individual human being is forever joined to the life of God the Father, the one who created the heavens and the earth.

We are told that it was not the spirit of Jesus, or the essence of Jesus, or the divine nature of Jesus, or the invisible part of Jesus, or the idea of Jesus, or anything like that, that ascended to the Father. It was the resurrected body of Jesus: a body that the disciples had touched, a body that ate and drank with them, a real, physical, but gloriously restored body - bearing the marks of nails and a spear. This is what ascended. The Ascension changed who God is.

Sometimes those who are involved with the life of the church are uncertain about the value of our humanity. We may be uncomfortable or even embarrassed about much that characterises being human - things like the reality of our bodies and our appetites, the fact that we are finite, and limited; the fact of our mortality and the certainty of our death; the painful difficulty we have in relationships; the struggles, joys, and setbacks that always seem to be a part of our quest for God; and the power that our feelings and emotions have over us. All of these parts of being human, and so many others, we frequently treat as less than holy, as somehow divorced from our spiritual and religious lives, even as bad things we should not have.

The Ascension, along with the Incarnation, is here to tell us that it is a good thing to be a human being; indeed, it is a wonderful and an important and a holy thing to be a human being. It is such an important thing that even God did it. Even more, the fullness of God now includes what it means to be a human being. The experience, the reality, and the stuff of being a person is so valuable that God has made it a part of God's life. The Ascension, the fact that God has brought into himself one who is fully human, this can remind us that simply being a human being is a sacred thing, never to be abused or taken lightly. Another thing the Ascension means is that God knows what it is like to be a person. God remembers what it is like to be a person.

When we approach God, when we consider God, and when we try to share our lives with God, it is important to remember that we are dealing with one who remembers - and who does not just know abstractly what our lives are like. God remembers what it is like to hurt and to laugh,

to pray and to hunger, to be lost and afraid, to celebrate and to mourn; God remembers what it is like to live and what it is like to die. God knows this, and God knows this in the only way that really matters as far as relationship is concerned. God knows because God has been there.

So, we are able to approach God, to reach out to God and to look for the presence and will of God, with confidence and with joy. For, as we turn toward God, we are not only dealing with the creator of the universe and the ruler of all time and of eternity; we are also drawing near to the one who lived our life and who has shared our fate. We are coming near to one who knows us, prays for us, and who cares.

We are coming home. Amen.

Conversation Questions

1. When we look at one another, do we see God?
2. How would we view Jesus after the resurrection if he had not ascended?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you?
What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

O God the King of glory,
you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ
with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven:
we beseech you, leave us not comfortless,
but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us
and exalt us to the place where our Saviour Christ is gone before,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

(or)

Risen, ascended Lord,
as we rejoice at your triumph,

fill your Church on earth with power and compassion,
that all who are estranged by sin
may find forgiveness and know your peace,
to the glory of God the Father.

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