

Reflection for 12-13 May 2018
The Ascension of the Lord, Year B
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Text: Acts 1:1-11, Ephesians 4:1-13, Mark 16:15-20.

When Jesus tells us to believe in him, he isn't talking about an intellectual proposition, but about our choice to live in accordance with his teaching: faith is an act of will. Jesus' teaching is not only his words, but his life, and it is the unfolding and realization of love.

Love, the way Jesus lives it, isn't just a feeling, but is a way of action. Love leads to the cross, because the way of love is so often opposed to the way of the world. The Beatitudes stand in stark opposition to worldly techniques for getting ahead in life. Blessed are those who mourn? Blessed are the meek? Blessed are the pure in heart? Blessed, but not usually "successful" according to the measures of wealth, popularity, and power.

The signs Jesus tells us will accompany those who love are the very acts in which we, at our best, put that love into practice. As the Second Reading puts it, we should "live ... with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love." Have you consoled someone in the depths of misery? You have driven out a demon in Jesus' name. Have you been arguing with someone and, by listening, come to see things in a new way and been reconciled with that person? You have spoken in a new tongue. Dealt justly and kindly with people, even when they do not do the same for you? You have picked up serpents. These are not easy things to do, and I remember many times when I have had the opportunity, but have failed to act with the love I could have.

From the vantage of the world, it is not safe to love like that; Jesus died for it, scorned and abandoned by the people he loved. His resurrection, however, shows that death doesn't matter, that its power is beneath that of love. Whatever harm we sustain because of love, we will be resurrected as Jesus was, and so whatever deadly thing we may have to drink, it will not harm what is most essential in us. The integrity to accept this even into death is a great gift of faith. The stigmata in Christ's resurrected body show that death and evil, though real, are not as real as the love that is God.

Today, Jesus' Ascension continues that story: the Kingdom of Heaven and our world are connected in Jesus, through the Holy Spirit he promises and sends to all of us. It is the sign of what we hope to fulfill when we pray as Jesus taught: "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven." When we, inflamed by that Holy Spirit, live with such love, we draw others into it and they live it too, just as at the Easter Vigil, from a few candles lit from the Paschal Candle, we passed the flame to one another until every candle was lit. We pray for the fulfillment of our collective mission, when every being is filled with the Spirit and drawn into God's Kingdom. When that is complete, Jesus' promised return will be the sign of the unification of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus is at our Father's right hand, but he is also still here in each of us, to love and be loved in ourselves and each other. When our part of this Earthly mission is done, we hope to be, like Jesus, drawn home into the endless depths of God's eternal, unifying love.