

Hello everyone,

I want to open by saying how much I miss seeing you all and how much I look forward to being able to gather again to celebrate mass.

This is the day we celebrate Jesus' ascension into heaven, when he last appeared to his disciples and commissioned them once again for mission, to all the nations and to go forth and baptize. In our Gospel today, Matthew's account of the Ascension, Jesus's final words are "remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

In our tradition, when we pray the rosary, the mystery of the Ascension calls forth in us Hope; and in the commentaries for this week's readings that hope comes from faith, from the belief that Christ broke open the heavens for us and that we who die believing in him will also follow him to heaven on our deaths. Tied to the other readings, particularly the psalm today (which is one of what are called "the enthronement psalms") we have hope because our Lord is the king of all the Earth, and in the second reading, he does great things for those who believe. When I pray, I always think of this divine hope as a hope for this world, for our lives, families, communities and society.

This is also World Communications Day in our Church, and in the past years our Pope has urged us to remember that we are all one human family, and to hold this vision of humanity up against the forces that seek to divide us along ethnic, religious and political lines. This year's theme, coming from the book of Exodus, is "that you may tell your children and grandchildren" life becomes history.

It is with the stories of our lives that we connect our individual experience with each other's experience and share history. We will all come out of this pandemic with stories, similar and different, that we will form history with. Yet not just this pandemic, but stories we share with each other of pain, and finding hope in challenging times, maybe how we found a stronger faith coming through the other side of tragedy and great loss. These painful memories can become powerful tools to help others get through their challenging times. In that process of sharing and being there for each other, we strengthen our bonds of community and give new meaning to our lives as disciples.

The pope uses the symbol of weaving fabric throughout this year's letter as a metaphor for how we humans build our stories; including our collective stories. He says "we are not born complete, but need to be constantly woven, knitted together," and that "life is given to us as an invitation to continue to weave the

wonderful mystery that we are.” We tell our stories, we write our text, we weave textiles.

The Pope warns us again this year that “not all stories are good stories.” There are those that don’t bring us together, they don’t build up communities of connection; but rather dehumanize others, isolate us through distrust and politics. There are also the stories that tell us tales of success through achievement and obtaining things... stories that “convince us that to be happy we continually need to gain, possess and consume.” Francis says these stories tie a knot in our cultural fabric. The big warning here is to be aware of what we are consuming through our communications technology, to pray for a spirit of discernment in what stories are being told to us, and most importantly to disconnect from the despair and apathy that is often the product of this connection.

For years in my graduate studies I started off each day drinking almost a whole pot of coffee, chain smoking cigarettes (one day I counted a half a pack by noon) while watching internet news. I told myself this is research, it had nothing to do with my schoolwork. One day my old friends Jason and Emily invited me out to dinner. They wanted to see how I was doing and check-in since we haven’t really

connected in years. I couldn't even have a personal conversation with my friends. I went on about the evils of the elites and the tax-dodging rich stashing their cash in off-shore accounts, on and on.

They asked, "but how are you doing..." "Well I'm miserable, but how can anyone selfishly seek to be happy in such an evil and unequal world?" A series of events unfolded where I was brought to crisis and had to give up this whole world-view and story. And really it started with disconnecting from this virtual world, and finding connection again with real people and real community. A few months later I had a new place in Sandy Hill with my roommate Qamer, who was a fellow graduate student. I remember a day (around this time of year in May) when I looked out my bedroom window to this beautiful view of the Gatineau Hills and for the first time in maybe 5 or 7 years feeling gratitude, and a simple peace connected with the hope that things are ok right now. In giving up that false sense of connection and illusion of being informed that is the promise of our technologies today, I was able to find real connection by coming home to my reality, which was simply the people around me. I used to think I was going to change the world when I couldn't even get through dinner with friends, and I certainly was too smart to believe in God or our Church. I eventually came to a new

understanding, grounded in an empowering humility that, for those around me I could do what I can.

Tying back into the scripture message this week in the First Reading the Disciples are still wondering about politics, “Lord, is this the time you will restore the Kingdom to Israel?” Jesus responds with it is not for us to “know the times or periods” and that soon he will send the Holy Spirit to them. This is the Pentecost event and we contemplate this mystery in our prayers where we are guided to reflect on love, particularly love experienced in community. Technology and communication, news and social media is our servant not our master. Christ is Lord, and we who share the faith and this connection find hope in living out our missionary call to discipleship by being present to one another; and the great gift of this connection is love. So let us continue to trudge through this time with hope, recalling once again the words of Jesus, our Lord, “remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

And let us offer a brief prayer for community and connection:

Lord we pray for all those in whom community and connection gives them hope and dispels despair, for us here at St. Joe's who sustain our hope through parish life and are enlivened by parish life, and those in recovery from addiction and

mental health who are missing their meetings and programs – their community that is so essential to their lives. We have hope that death is not the final word, and that this isolation also, one day, will pass and we can be with each other again.

And we will finish with Pope Francis's prayer for this World Communications Day:

“O Mary, woman and mother, you wove the divine Word in your womb, you recounted by your life the magnificent works of God. Listen to our stories, hold them in your heart and make your own the stories that no one wants to hear. Teach us to recognize the good thread that runs through history. Look at the tangled knots in our life that paralyze our memory. By your gentle hands, every knot can be untied. Woman of the Spirit, mother of trust, inspire us too. Help us build stories of peace, stories that point to the future. And show us the way to live them together.”

**Andrew Pump**