

Feast of the Lord's Ascension - A

May 3/4,2008

Homily.

Love builds bridges, connects us, unites us with one another enabling us to be family and community.

Love's true origin is our God, and it was incarnate, enfleshed in the person of Jesus.

Today's feast of the Ascension, so beautifully presented in the magnificent stained glass window in the west wall, is truly a celebration of Jesus' love, a powerful image of Jesus as bridge builder.

The Ascension blows our minds, challenges us to think beyond the way we usually think. Not to think simply in terms of either/or but in terms of both/and. Let me explain.

As we heard in today's readings, after Jesus had appeared to his disciples over forty days, encouraging and instructing them, he ascended into the heavens in their presence. And we are told that he was given a throne at the right hand of the Father, and given dominion, lordship, over all creation.

Jesus, with his glorified body, is reunited with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the glory of God's kingdom. Today we celebrate the great honor and glory given to Jesus.

But we also heard Jesus promise his disciples, promise us, that he would be with us to the end of time. We are tempted to say where is he? He is either with the Father or he is with us. But the answer, which we do not fully understand, is that he is both with the Father and with us. Not either here or there, but both here and there.

And the reason this can be is that Jesus, Son of God, the Christ, our Lord, by being who He is, has built a bridge, has connected heaven and earth, the divine and the human, the spiritual and the physical. These things are no longer separated, but are truly united, joined together.

And this has tremendous implications for us. This should make a great difference in the way we see ourselves, see one another, see all of creation.

For when we say that Jesus has redeemed us, we are affirming that Jesus has made it possible for us to experience this unity in ourselves. We have been reborn in baptism as children of God, have received God's spirit, and so can feel the unity of spirit and flesh, of the human and the divine in us. We walk on earth, but we carry heaven within us. We are both children of Adam and Eve and children of God.

It is by listening to God's word to us in scripture, by opening ourselves to God's life and healing in the sacraments, by opening our hearts to God's spirit in prayer, that we experience the risen Lord within us.

In our Gospel we heard Jesus tell us to go to Galilee where we would meet him. Galilee is that place where they had first met Jesus and where they were first chosen to accept the invitation to be his disciples. Where is our Galilee? where did we first come to know Jesus and respond to his invitation? Where do we experience the risen Lord today? In what people? In what places? In what events?

Jesus has promised to meet us in Galilee, to be with us until the end of time, and it is so important that we remember that

promise at this particular time in the life of our families, the life of our church, in the life our nation and our world.

And as great as that promise is, there is an even greater promise that Jesus makes to us as we remember his ascension and glorification. And that is that He has shown us the way to the destiny God has in store for each one of us.

At the last supper Jesus told his friends, told us, that we should not be troubled or saddened by his going to the Father. “In my Father’s house there are many mansions; I am going to prepare a place for you, and when I have done so, I will come to you to take you to myself so that you may be with me where I am.” What a promise!

If we follow Jesus, if we live the paschal mystery we celebrate at this and every Mass, we will share the glory of the resurrection and ascension of the Lord. Today’s feast is first of all Jesus’ feast. But it is also ours. By his love, Jesus has built bridges that unite us with himself, with one another, and with our world. That love, that we first experienced in our mothers, is the love we celebrate on this feast of the ascension. It is the love that unites heaven and earth in us.