

ASCENSION OF THE LORD May 17, 2015

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED. HOMECOMING ACCOLADES. “God mounts his throne with shouts of joy; the Lord, with trumpet blasts!” But first he wanted to take care of those he left behind. The disciples had doubts and hesitations believing that Jesus had risen from the dead. So it was in God’s plan that the resurrection appearances would convince them of it and that our faith might be confirmed by their witness. Then Jesus ceased appearing to them. He ascended into heaven to clothe with his heavenly glory the humanity he had assumed when he emptied himself, took the form of a slave being born in the likeness of men. Who can imagine the grand festival the Father had prepare for an obedient son coming home.

Not just resuscitated, in his risen body Jesus was free of the limits of space and time. So why did he stop making those appearances? He could have appeared everywhere at any time in every age to all his followers, generation after generation, to confirm their belief that he is alive. We can be comforted by doubting Thomas. Jesus said to him: Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

We have to remember that our way of knowing Jesus is very different from apostles and disciples. They accompanied Jesus in his public ministry, knowing and experiencing him as being fully human. Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph and Mary, could be recognized like any of us by the uniqueness of the features of his face, his gestures, the way he walked, his fingerprints, and that voice. My flock hears my voice, he said, and they follow me. The apostles had rare glimpses of his divine powers. The human body he assumed veiled his divine nature.

No one coming after apostles could have that same experience of Jesus as they did. In fact, that could have been one of the reasons he said it was expedient for them that he go away. I must go to my Father and your Father. They had to be pushed as it were to a grander vision of who he really is: Son of God made man. They were like Mary Magdalene in the garden looking for his body. When he call her name, Mary, she grasped his feet. He told her, Do not to cling to me. Yes, he was the same Jesus whose feet she had bathed, and whose words enraptured her. But things were different with him now. The apostles needed to hear that too. They may have felt safe and specially blessed when he appeared with his greetings of ‘Peace be with you;’ when they could recognize him in the breaking of bread or cooking fish on the beach. If we had been there we would likely have wished with them, Stay with us, Lord.

He had told them he was going away to prepare places in the Father’s house for them and that he would come back to take them with him. He promised them that he would not leave them orphans during the little while he was away. That little while is already two thousand years and no one knows how much longer it will be before he returns

clothed in glory as Lord of all creation and judge of the living and the dead. During that little while before his return he gave his disciples an assignment: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation.”

We are assigned the same task. To aid us he kept his promise not to leave us orphans by sending us his own divine Spirit to dwell in us. Jesus himself is with us in other ways too, enumerated in the Document on the Church at Vatican II. When two or three are gathered in my name, I am with you, he said. He is present in this assembly of his faithful, in the words of the holy scriptures especially when publicly proclaimed. For “In the beginning was the Word; the Word was in God’s presence and the Word was God.”

Above all it is in this Eucharistic celebration that he is present in the priest and the consecrated bread and wine. The priest says Jesus’ very words over those fruits of earth and vine and work of human hands: “This is my body.... this is my blood” and Jesus is truly here when the Holy Spirit is invoked to make them into his body and blood. It is true that both the humanity and divinity of Jesus are veiled in the Sacred Sacrament. We believe he is here because he said those words and he is the Truth. There is another presence of Jesus that we are also challenged to believe. Mother Teresa of Calcutta could see him in the poorest of the poor. Remember his words: “What you do to the least of my brothers, you do to me.” That is something for us to remember when we leave here and go out into the streets and byways of the world.

For now we are many more than two or three gathered in Jesus’ name. The Word has been proclaimed to us, so now let us prepare to recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Then eating his body and drinking his blood at communion we will receive a pledge of eternal life with him. Jesus said, If anyone eats this bread, he shall live forever; the bread I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. We prayed in the opening prayer, that where he our head has gone, we members of his body hope to follow. To him with the Father and Holy Spirit be praise, honor, glory and ready obedience now and forever. AMEN