

The Solemnity of the Ascension is the one day of the year that we hear two **different** versions of the same story ... and ... since we are in year "C" ... the two different versions come to us from the same source ... St. Luke. And I almost wish that ... we could have read the Gospel first and **then** ... the first reading. Why? You see ... our story of salvation history can be divided into three periods: God's **promise** ... to send a savior ... the **fulfillment** of that promise ... and finally ... the age of the **church**. Of course ... God's **promise** ... begins in Genesis and continues all throughout the Old Testament.

The **fulfillment** ... is wholly contained ... in the conception ... birth ... life ... death ... resurrection and ... finally the ascension of Jesus Christ. The conclusion of the story of the period of **fulfillment** ... is what we hear in our Gospel today. Now, if one relied **solely** ... on the last Chapter of St. Luke's Gospel ... one could easily conclude that the Resurrection, the meeting of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, His appearance to the apostles and the Ascension ... all took place on one **very** busy day ... but ... St. Luke tells us in "**Acts of the Apostles**" that the Ascension was ... in fact ... forty days **after** the Resurrection. And whereas St. Luke's Gospel account of the Ascension **closes** ... the period of **fulfillment** of the promise ... his account in Acts of the Apostles ... is his **opening** narrative of the story of the **beginning** ... of the age of the Church ... a story that begins with the Ascension and is still being written today.

Oh ... Jesus **would** continue to be with His disciples ... but never again as He had in the past ... walking with them ... eating or drinking with them. He **would** continue to be with them ... but in a new way ... a different way. He had gone ... to prepare a place for them ... for us!

But what did that mean to those disciples He left on earth? What was this new way He would continue to be with them? He had given them the wonderful gift of Eucharist ... though they did not yet completely realize it. He had taught them and even though they did not yet comprehend the impact of His words ... those words stayed with them and bound them together. But even more than that ... He **commissioned** them to be the witnesses of all that He had said and of all that had taken place. He charged them that repentance and forgiveness **must** be preached in His name to **all**. His **disciples** ... were to be **no** less ... than His visible presence in the world. **But** ... not quite yet. They were to wait to be "**clothed with power from on high**." And although they did not know what all that meant ... it seems that there was a sense that something **wonderful** was yet to happen ... for the Gospel tells us that they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. To Find out what that might be ... Luke makes his friend, Theophilus ... and us ... wait for the next book.

As that next book begins ... In our first reading ... Luke is looking not to the past ... not at Jesus' life on earth ... but to the future. The disciples in this version seem much less sure and much more confused and revert back to the old misunderstanding about ... just where Jesus' kingdom is. Jesus tells them not to

worry about that: **That** ... is the Father's business! Then ... as He had done in the Gospel version ... He restates the disciples mission ... to be His "witnesses ... to the ends of the earth." He ... who has already amply demonstrated that His love has no bounds ... now ... once again shows that love by this ultimate act of trust.

God made man could have so easily ... not ascended to the Father ... remained here on earth and tended to the building of the Kingdom, Himself. It **would** have been done right ... perfectly ... no mistakes. But instead ... He trusted the building of the Kingdom ... first to the Apostles ... then to their successors ... and finally to the rest of us. He did this fully aware of our very human imperfections and He did not leave us on our own. He would very shortly send the Holy Spirit and ... He would be with us through His Church. This ... we will celebrate in one short week.

It is through the Church ... led by the Holy Spirit ... that we are to justify God's great trust in us to **preach** repentance & His forgiveness to all nations ... to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth. So ... how do we do this? How do we witness? How do we justify God's faith in us? Do we proclaim the good news whenever we have the chance or is it out of sight / out of mind until the weekend when we passively sit and listen? Do we help to relieve suffering, end war, promote justice, or spread peace and love or do we surrender to hopelessness ... give up and do nothing. ... It does sometimes ... even **most** of the time ... seem overwhelming. But just as I am tempted to say: "Lord, it's just too much; we are in over our heads; You had better come back and do it **yourself**" ... I remember what that modern day martyr ... St. Oscar Romero ... charged us: "**We cannot do everything ... but this enables us to do something, and to do it very well ... It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.**" The Ascension commemorates **our** commissioning by Jesus to build His Kingdom. So don't look *up at the skies*. Jesus is **not** there ... He's here ... and He's waiting for us to get to work!