



7th Week of Easter: 29/30 May 2022

The Ascension of the Lord and Awaiting the Gift of His Spirit

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

Everyone Matters

The story is told of a person wanting to become a member of the Church and explaining to the Priest that he didn't want to become too involved: going to Mass each Sunday, being a Reader, visit the sick or help with other Church activities. Apparently, the Priest took him across town to see a boarded-up Church, together with other closed up buildings all ready for demolition. The Priest in the story was giving a not too subtle message: if we want a Church with no obligations, no burdens, no demands, then all we want is a Church with no life in it.

The other day, I was speaking with my friend Father John about the Church. He is a Canon Lawyer and had been reading up on the Synod which is currently underway in the Church. Its origins are to be traced back to the Fourth Century: the involvement of Laity in considering the needs of the Church and its Apostolic work is not something new, even if the focus over a number of years has been on the Synod of Bishops meeting in Rome. We agreed that the people who keep our parishes going are right there before us in every parish we have served in.

When celebrating Mass for a Priest who has the COVID-Infection, I found the Church open and ready for me, someone was doing work in the Sacristy preparing the Altar, the Sanctuary: the hosts were there, the wine and water too; the missals and lectionary ready; there was a Reader and Eucharistic Minister too. As I came out of the Church after Mass, I met a volunteer, an elderly man; he was preparing to paint the fence. He would have liked a few others to help, but he was doing his bit. I spoke to him, and was reminded of my Dad helping laying the foundation for the Holy Family Church in Coventry where I was ordained years later. We can all tell similar stories. And, only last night, I was at a Catenian Circle Celebration of 100 years of its foundation in 1922 in the City of Birmingham. Professional and business men are coming together with the support of their wives, to celebrate socially and care for members in need in the spirit of the Gospel and Church teaching on witness to the Catholic Faith in family, professional and business life in the challenging circumstances of today.

Last Sunday I was in a Parish for Baptism: I met a man in the Sacristy counting the collection. He said, in answer to my asking his name "I am only Joe". I said "You may be only Joe, but you're important in this Church. Father Srinu cannot do it all himself. As I walked through the Sacristy there were many boxes piled on top of each other: the young Priest explained this was the collection of items for the foodbank. In the conversation I could feel his enthusiasm and the joy of the worshipping life of the Church too: the celebration of First Holy Communion, Confirmation and the brightness

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of the church with coloured ribbons at the ends of the benches and an Altar fall celebrating the Resurrection of Jesus.

The Ascension, the completion of Jesus' life on earth, is being celebrated with great joy in these days. In the Letter to the Ephesians on the Solemnity of the Ascension, we read this prayer: "May he enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you can see what hope his call holds for you, what rich glories he has promised the saints will inherit and how infinitely great is the power he has exercised for us believers ... (the Father of glory) has put all things under his feet, and made him as the ruler of everything, the head of the Church."

St. Luke tells us that as the disciples witnessed the Ascension of Our Lord "They worshipped Him and went back to Jerusalem full of joy; and they were continually in the Temple praising God."

In the Gospel for the Seventh Sunday of Easter, which follows the Ascension, we hear Jesus praying for them in St. John's Gospel that "the world will realise that it was you (His Father) who sent me." That was to be the calling of the Disciples to make Jesus known and in the power of the Holy Spirit, the celebration of whose coming we now await, they were empowered to do so. We see the power of the Spirit at work in Stephen, the First Martyr, in the reading from Acts of the Apostles for the 7th Sunday.

This is the time when, waiting in prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit, we can each reflect on how we feel called to witness to the way of Jesus in our families, with our neighbours, in society and in work. We prepare and discern. God will give the growth through His Spirit in our lives. Each one of us has a gift to offer for a better world: let us offer that gift, God will give the growth that comes from it.

Today we are called to continue the work of Jesus: His Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit which we celebrate at Pentecost makes that possible. Everyone matters in that mission of the Church.

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