

Ascension Sunday/Festival of the Christian Home/Mother's Day

May 12, 2013

Acts 1:1-11; John 17:20-26;

"Grounded in the Ascension"

Happy Ascension Sunday! Last Thursday, the 40th day after Easter, was actually Ascension Day, the seldom recognized day in the church that we remember that Jesus, as the Apostle's Creed tells us, *"ascended into heaven, to sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead."*

It is really one of the more important events in the life of Jesus, along with his Baptism, the Transfiguration, his Crucifixion, and the Resurrection. Yet most of us, and I confess, myself included, don't have a great understanding of what this event, the Ascension, is really all about.

We know it signals the end of Jesus' earthly ministry and begins or returns him to his place of glory with God in heaven. Traditional Christian theology understands the consummation of Christ into heaven as the union of Jesus' humanity with the divine and therefore a foretaste of our own eventual place with God. Jesus' glorification, his taking his place in heaven with God the Father/Mother, is for us, for our good, that we might know him in his glorified state even though he is no longer with us in bodily form. Scripture tells us also that it is through his glorification that he goes to prepare a place for us in the heavenly or spiritual realm. Ultimately, the ascension and Jesus' state of being after it, are all mystery, and we cannot attain a complete knowledge of these things.

More current theologians address the ascension as something that was perhaps a way for the early church to deal with the loss of Jesus and yet maintain his role as a present and continuing influence on the faith community. Whether it is through the process of "demythologizing" or through the more recent approach to "search for the historical Jesus" the Ascension is thought of more as a device or explanation that allows faith in Christ while not dismissing the real presence and experience of Christians in a spiritual relationship with Christ and his Spirit. It may originally have been a way to explain why experiences of the risen Christ ceased to continue to happen or perhaps even a way of ending continuing rumors of visits and pronouncements by the resurrected Christ.

Perhaps a more simple way to talk about it is to say that there is an understanding that as long as Jesus remained with the disciples, the church would never evolve, it could not come into existence. Jesus had to leave, had to depart for his followers to take on the responsibilities of leadership and development of this new faith, this new Jewish sect.

It is kind of like when the chick is big enough that it needs to leave the nest. Or like the parting of a young person from their family to go and strike out on their own. It is something that needs to happen if the young person is going to develop into a mature, responsible adult in society. If he or she stays at home and continues in the role of the child, they will never, as we say, "grow up." The parents need to become, not necessarily less important, but rather that they have to take on a new role. The relationship between parent and child has to change, has to evolve, into something that allows for greater freedom as well as greater responsibility and accountability for the young person.

It reminds me of when I was a boy and we had block parties on the street where we lived. We lived on a dead end street and so it was easy for us to hold block parties. They didn't have to close off the street to traffic or anything. It seems that these events often took place at my Uncle Bob and Aunt Nina's yard. They lived just 2 doors down from us. These were summer time events and included charcoal burning grills with hamburgers, hot dogs and bratwurst cooking on them and sending their scrumptious aroma throughout the neighborhood. I distinctly remember also the smell of beer, tapped fresh from the keg. We kids didn't get to drink the beer, or that is we were not supposed to but usually

we would somehow get just a taste of it, whether from Uncle Bob or Mr. Hoops, or one of the men there. But it is the smell of fresh tapped beer and brats cooking on a grill on a hot summer evening that brings my mind right back to those days of block parties on Boyd Street in my home town back in Wisconsin.

I remember that there was the gathering of the neighbors. Our family with me and my sister and 2 brothers, Uncle Bob, Aunt Nina and my cousin Sara, the Schetzel's, Clayton and Betty and their kids Suzy, Bart and Billy and the Lefeber's, Leo and Marion with Kathy and Patty, our direct neighbors on either side of us. Then there were the Koeck's from across the street and Grandma and Grandpa Hobbs next to them. Mrs. Gaselle, the old lady who used to show us how to make rock candy and then the Hoops' family with my friend Glen and his sisters Lori and Linda. Don and Audrey Nevela and their little daughter Julie lived at the end of the street and across from them was Betty, the older lady with the white hair and lastly Rob, the old widower who lived next to Uncle Bob and Aunt Nina. That was the neighborhood.

Block parties included, besides all the eating, games and a chance to play not only with our friends but with the adults too! But interestingly, as I think back, I don't recall a lot of the mothers or other women present for most of these events. I remember kids and the dads but not the moms. And you know, that is because the moms had ascended. The women all would ascend into Aunt Nina's living room or kitchen, where they would visit with one another and take care of some last minute tasks like finishing the deviled eggs or putting whip cream on some wonderful desserts.

So, while the block parties seemed to always look like the men's event, they were the ones who would be out there cooking the meat, sweating over the hot grill, and they were the ones who hauled out the lawn chairs and tables and got the keg of beer, and they were the ones playing softball with the kids or spraying us with water hoses, it was really the women who had arranged everything. That even though the women of the neighborhood didn't seem to be present, they were the ones that had decided who was going to bring what foods, who was taking care of the drinks, which husbands were going to do what, and so on and so forth. To the children who were having the time of their lives, playing and just enjoying the life of children, the mothers may have seemed to be absent. Yet, they were the ones who were truly responsible for arranging everything and making sure that the block party happened.

That's kind of what the Ascension is like. Jesus had taught his disciples all they needed to know. He had lived the life of total commitment to God. He had given himself over completely to the ways of love and compassion, even to death and returned to them through the power of resurrection, to give them all the last minute details of what they would need to know about how to be the faithful children of God. So, by the time Jesus ascends, everything has been taken care of, all the details are in place, and all the disciples need to do is wait for the party to begin.

We live in a time when the party is still going on. That's basically another way of saying that the Kingdom/kin-dom of God is at hand. And all we need do is take part in it. All has been taken care of, all has been prepared, and Jesus, like the mothers at the block party, has ascended, is just inside the house, if we need him for an emergency, he is there.

So rejoice dear children, for everyone is invited. In fact we are called to go out and invite all the neighbors, even those that live further down the street, for this party is about bringing all of us together, making all of us one. Can you smell those brats cooking? It's time! Amen.