

Ascension of the Lord Year B

May 13, 2018

It is not for you to know the times or seasons

Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1: 17-23; Mark 16: 15-20

As one who takes the 15th century English proverb, “Early to Bed, Early to Rise”¹ seriously, it is challenging when evening events drag on. All too often, I begin to think to myself, “How can I discreetly manage an exit?” If I am hosting an event, I seek a natural ending point, always keeping it moving. It is a fact that some people have a difficult time ending things, not able to ‘pull the plug’, so to speak.

In our first reading from Acts of the Apostles, Jesus reminded the apostles that “it is not for you to know the times or seasons.” The obvious first impression is that Jesus is placing distance between himself and the apostles. He will restore the Kingdom in His own good time, and not a moment sooner. In short, it was none of their business, while at the same time he is telling them “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.” In other words, at this moment, it was not yet their time, but that time would come.

In an increasingly mobile society, Americans come and go more often. We can expect to move no fewer than 11 times in our lifetime.² Whether in search of a better home or for work reasons, it is increasingly rare to live somewhere for an extended period of time. My parents bought their house in 1966, while I have moved many times with changes of assignment. While nearly 70% of those living in Minnesota are originally “from here,” we still move a lot.

The Feast of the Ascension highlights that even while Jesus has gone back to the Father in heaven, nevertheless he remains head of the Church, the Body of Christ. He is not absent from us. Though in heaven, he is also with us; and we while on earth are with him. Christ is on earth with us by his divinity, his power and his love. We cannot be in heaven now, but while on earth, we can be there by

¹ Dame Juliana Berners, “The Treatise of Fishing with an Angle,” 1496 A.D.

² “Why do Americans Move so Much More than Europeans?” The Atlantic, 21 Oct. 2016

love.³ Saint Augustine commented on this feast by drawing the distinction between promise and fulfillment. What has been promised to us, has not yet been fulfilled in our bodies: “Christ is now exalted above the heavens, but he still suffers on earth all the pain that we, the members of his body, have to bear.”⁴

This is not a solemnity about Christ’s departure from us, but rather represents the fullness of his presence. He remains with us in a new mode and each time we seek communion with Him in prayer, he draws nearer. If we feel his absence, where have we gone?

It also serves as a call for our own future. Where Christ reigns in heaven, He invites us to join the Church triumphant, those countless souls who have persevered in God’s grace and now sing psalms, hymns and inspired songs to God. Our true home is not here; it is with Him. Wherever we are, can be our home. Four walls do not define us; our relationship with the Lord does.

The Lord desires that we discover our true freedom as members of the Body, each according to our own role. While we certainly understand the apostles’ fear at the time of the Ascension, time would prove that indeed Jesus never abandoned the Church.

Where He is, the Lord is leading us to meet Him. “God mounts his throne to shouts of joy.” Let us eagerly go forth in joy and gladness, ready to meet Him, not on our timetable, but on His. Allow the Lord Jesus to lead you, when and where He desires, and your heart will be at peace.

³ cf. Augustine, *Sermo de Ascensione Domini*

⁴ Ibid.