

Preparation for Holy Spirit Within Ascension of the Lord/C Sunday, May 8, 2016
5:00 PM Vigil Mass Acts 1:1-11; Eph 1:17-23; Lk 24:46-53 (A mother's love is a natural sacrament—a natural sacrament—of the love of God.)

When we come to the feast of the Ascension of the Lord I think we are all at a great disadvantage in contrast to the other great events in the life of Christ. For example, when we celebrate the Nativity of Christ, although we weren't there and no one recorded exactly what happened, nonetheless we have seen children born and we can use our imagination and our senses to develop a tableau that we can pray about or pray through; and this is in fact a highly recommended form of prayer called "contemplation" by St. Ignatius of Loyola. Or when it comes to the crucifixion, although we have never seen a crucifixion I trust, nonetheless we have become familiar with torture and cruelty and death, and so these are not completely foreign to our experience.

But when we come to the Ascension of the Lord, what do we compare it to? There is nothing in our experience like it. In fact, the very meaning of this feast is that the risen Christ now goes beyond our sight, beyond our senses, and therefore beyond our imagination to that dimension that St. Paul refers to when he says, "No eye can see, no ear can hear, no mind can imagine what God has prepared for those who love him." And so we are in a sense in a disadvantage because this is a moment of transition, but it's a necessary moment because **the risen Christ leaves our line of sight precisely for a good reason, that we can become open to the gift of the Spirit within us.** And Jesus told his disciples, "If you really loved me, you would be happy; you would rejoice that I'm leaving you." That may sound hard to believe on the surface, but we have to understand that Christ's departure in his resurrected presence was a necessary prelude to the coming of the Holy Spirit within us. And this requires of all of us a shift, **a radical shift, away from the world outside of us,** which is good and holy in its own way, but now to the world within, **to the presence of the Holy Spirit, which is called in today's gospel reading "power from on high."** Most people are very uncomfortable with the shift toward the within, toward the soul. In fact sometimes we don't even believe the Holy Spirit is truly within us, that we have become a temple of the Holy Spirit, a temple of God. But we have. **That is the whole culmination of this work of Christ, culmination as long as we are on earth.** But of course all of creation is moving toward the omega point, where Christ is the end and the focus of God's work.

Now in the life of the Church because the Holy Spirit has been given to us we now become Christ for others, or can be. That is the very idea of the communion of the saints. Now human beings are Christ for others, icons each of us in our own way. In a very particular way, at least in my experience, **mothers are Christ, who teach about the Spirit within.** In my own experience, **my mother taught this deep inner confidence in God.** She had breast cancer and she was very concerned and afraid, as most people are with cancer. She asked for the Anointing of the Sick, and she said that the moment she was anointed all her fear departed. Her life was very troubled in various ways, as all of our lives are, but she always had this confidence in the God within, and she gave that confidence to me.

Isaiah, the great poetic prophet of the Old Testament, when **comparing God's love** to something people could understand, compared it **to a mother's love.** In fact he compared it in such a way that he said, "Even if a mother could forget her child, God will never." In other words, **a mother's love is a natural sacrament—a natural sacrament—of the love of God.** We can compare God's love to it by simply saying it is more than, superlative to, because it is of course the source of all love and in fact all being.

So this weekend as we celebrate Mother's Day, I think it would be very appropriate if we take some time in prayer to **reflect on our mothers in gratitude or in petition.** If our mothers were so troubled that they were not able to love us, then we need to pray for them because I'm sure that there is a natural desire in every mother to love her children, although life can twist and tear at the fabric of life and make that sometimes impossible. But again, **we believe in the healing power of God on this side of death, on the other side of death.** So whether our mothers are living or passed on, if they have had terrible problems, if they were not able to be Christ to us, then we need to pray for them, believing in the power of God to heal. If they were Christ for us, then we need to be full of the gratitude that expresses to God a real sense of our being blessed, a real sense of appreciation for the gifts that God gives us and, in my case anyway, especially the gift of my mother.