

Baptism in the Holy Spirit The Ascension of the Lord/A Sunday, May 28, 2017
9:00 AM **Acts 1:1-11;** Eph 1:17-23; **Mt 28:16-20** (A great deal of life is about
loss and how we deal with it.)

“Men of Galilee, why are you looking up into the sky?”

That’s a question that perhaps unbelievers are always asking of believers: What are you really looking at? But here it has a different meaning because **the Ascension of Jesus was for the disciples what people today call a bummer.** It is in our liturgy a feast and the music is festive, but it was not a celebration for the disciples. We cannot over exaggerate the traumatic nature of Jesus’ passion and death for the disciples, and we mustn’t think for a moment that the resurrection simply blotted out all the darkness and healed all the wounds. In fact **it took them quite a while to get to even think about what the resurrection really meant.**

Now Jesus is withdrawing physically from their presence, doubling down on their pain, leaving behind only promises. And the experience of the disciples is also something we share in; it is also our experience. **A great deal of life is about loss and how we deal with it.** But Jesus makes something very clear, although it’s hard to believe. He says, **“It is better for you that I go.”** It is better for you that I leave. It is better for you if you never see me again. **Now what loving person would ever say that to the beloved?**

And yet there is a rich meaning in all of this because **from Jesus’ viewpoint there is something even more powerful than experiencing God in him.** We do believe that anyone who heard him, saw him, touched him, experienced his healing power, we believe they were experiencing God. He is God enfleshed. But there’s something greater, and he kept alluding to it throughout his ministry. He even said, “Greater things than I have done you shall do also.” What is the greater? What is this all about? **It’s about the Holy Spirit.** “It is better for you that I go.”

Now our Church teaches us that we receive the Holy Spirit in our Baptism and in every sacrament. But that doesn’t mean we actually experience the Holy Spirit in the way Jesus meant or what the Acts of the Apostles means when it talks about power that will come to you from on high. **Many of us have not had that experience.** It is called by some people **“Baptism in the Holy Spirit.”** It is a powerful experience. **It is a life-changing event.** I remember when I

experienced it for the first time, well, it's only one time really, many years ago when I was a young priest floundering around wondering why I actually got ordained. God answered that with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. **It is a powerful, uplifting, and life-enhancing experience.**

And the disciples experienced this at what we call "Pentecost." But that's because they were so devastated by Jesus' withdrawal from their lives. And this pattern holds throughout time. **When loss or a feeling of emptiness devastates individuals or even communities, this devastation creates a new opportunity for the Baptism in the Holy Spirit,** for a renewal as it were out of the blue, for life-changing light. And we can become quite surprised by joy in the midst of great grief and sadness. The greatest saints experienced the most sublime delight only after undergoing what they called "the dark night of the soul."

However as I mentioned already, many Christians have not really been touched by this power yet—always say yet, not yet; **but always consider it part of your future if you are in this large category of people who have never felt the power of the Holy Spirit.** I believe myself that the reason why many people do not experience this is that actually they've never really experienced tremendous loss or abandonment or devastation that has **hollowed them out enough to make room for this gift.** Perhaps the Spirit comes only to those who desperately need it. But even that is a consolation for us to keep in mind: that even when life is most cruel and **we have completely run out of our own resources, that in itself is a very special opportunity for a new and more powerful relationship with God.** May I say we merely need to ask for it. This is what the apostles experienced, the saints as well. This is actually what propelled the Church into existence. If it weren't for this, the Church wouldn't exist. We wouldn't be here this morning. What we need to keep in mind is that it is not always necessary to flee pain; that tends to be our tendency. We flee pain. We try to escape suffering. That's not always wise. **Sometimes pain and suffering leads to a more abundant life.** That's the experience of the Paschal Mystery. **The emptier we become, the more room is there for God to fill.**