

ASCENSION - 2019

There are many different themes that could be chosen for a homily for today's feast

This year I'm struck by the implications of Christ's Ascension for our human destiny.

Jesus has been appearing to the disciples during the course of 40 days since his Resurrection.

Then he leads the disciples to a mountaintop where he gives them their marching orders:

"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem ... and to the ends of the earth."

And then ... Jesus is lifted up, and "a cloud takes him from their sight."

It's no wonder the apostles stand there awe-struck "looking intently at the sky."

Who wouldn't?

Once, while I was on vacation in Arizona, I caught sight of a large passenger balloon in flight over the horizon.

I said to my travelling companion: "That's really cool. I would like to do it someday, but I'm kind of afraid."

My buddy responded: "Well, then it's decided. Tomorrow we go for a balloon ride."

And so we did.

It was amazing to soar above the landscape as birds and angels do!

When I returned home I shared my experience with another friend.

Her response was: "Not me! If God intended us to fly he would have given us wings!"

But God does intend that his children should fly.

Not that our bodies will ascend into the sky as did that of Jesus ...

... rather, because of Christ's Death and Resurrection, our souls can soar to heaven ...

... and indeed, our bodies will rise on the last day to be citizens of that new heaven and new earth we have been reading these past few weeks.

Of course, there is a catch: We will first have to die.

But I can't imagine a more calming view of death as the one our Christian faith celebrates today: death as ascension to the Father.

Jesus is our model, and his Paschal Mystery is the pattern for our Christian lives.

As Jesus ascends to glory, glory is our assured and blessed destiny in Christ.

Jesus was born in our flesh; he suffered and died in our flesh; he rose from the dead in our flesh; and it was in the flesh that he ascended into heaven.

Yes, the body of Jesus had been transformed through the power of his Resurrection, but it is still a human body, now seated at the right hand of the Father.

The Ascension proclaims our faith that death has no lasting power over Christ, and it has no lasting power over the Christian believer.

Our destiny is not the grave, but glory.

Death, then, is not terminal. Death does not end our existence.

It cannot consign us to the grave and nothing more.

Our Lord's Ascension is the prototype and promise of our inheritance of eternal life in heaven.

Today's feast celebrates the theology of Christian hope ...

- hope for you and for me,
- hope for the young and for the old,
- for the accepting and for the fearful,
- hope for those preparing for this passage,
- and hope for those who mourn their passing.

It is because of this hope that I am able to declare with confidence the words of faith I always read at the committal service at a graveside:

"Then the word that is written shall come about: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? For thanks be to God who has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!