

Ascension Sunday

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[0 : 00] 40 days after our Lord's physical and bodily resurrection, Jesus ascended back to his Father in heaven.

The ascension of our Lord illuminates, it highlights, various key beliefs from Holy Scripture. Jesus is King. Jesus is High Priest.

Our Lord fulfills the imagery of Daniel chapter 7. As he is the Ancient of Days, he is the Son of Man. We read in Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 and 14.

I saw in the night visions and behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man. And he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.

And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.

[1 : 04] His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away. And his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. And our resurrected and triumphant Lord now sits upon his throne reigning from on high.

And all of this is true. But what does this have to do with us in this present moment? Here in our gospel text from John chapters 15 and 16, we read, we heard, that our Lord promises to send the Comforter, who is also called the Spirit of Truth.

He promised to send this Comforter to his disciples. And this Comforter, the Holy Spirit, will proceed from the Father. We then read that he, the Holy Spirit, will bear witness of Jesus.

Likewise, the disciples will bear witness to our Lord. The word for witness in Greek is where we get the word martyr.

Martyr. You see, the Holy Spirit will bear witness of Jesus to these disciples. And these disciples will then bear witness of Jesus to the world.

[2 : 32] And how does this happen? It happens through martyrdom. Let me say that again. It happens through martyrdom.

Now, martyrdom can obviously mean physical death for a particular cause. In other words, many people have given their lives for their faith by suffering death.

But martyrdom is more than just physically dying for God. Martyrdom is an attitude that we are all called to have as Christians.

It's a way of life. It's the way of the cross. You see, the Holy Spirit bore witness to us as we were brought into the kingdom of God by way of holy baptism.

The Holy Spirit makes Christ known to us in the church where we receive his grace and his forgiveness. We are all called to have as we were brought into the kingdom of God by way of holy baptism.

[3 : 43] But our calling now is to bear witness to Christ. By bearing witness to others. And we are to do that in the here and now.

So how do we do that? How do we bear witness to Christ? Well, we do this by dying. We do this by dying to ourselves.

We do this with an attitude of martyrdom. Friends, the world does not need another talking head. There is so much chatter and noise.

They do not listen anymore. What the world needs are Christians who will die to themselves. The world doesn't need another narcissist pretending to have all the answers.

The world needs to know that we do not have all the answers to life's struggles and questions. We just don't.

[4 : 52] But our ascended Lord works all things to the good of those who love him and who have been called according to his promise. We believe that Christ will bring truth and justice to bear on

this earth.

Christ will have the final say. And that's our comfort. But until then, we are called to bear witness to Christ, to others, by dying to our own agendas, by dying to our own ambitions, by dying to our own desires, and allowing the Holy Spirit to control us and to use us for the sake of the kingdom of God and for the sake of others.

Getting back to our gospel text, Jesus tells his disciples that they will bear witness. Again, the word meaning martyr.

And then he goes on to say the following in John chapter 16, verses 1 through 3. These things I have spoken to you that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues.

Yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor me.

[6 : 26] And that's exactly what happened. To these original disciples, all except for John, who died in lonely exile, and of course Judas, who betrayed our Lord and fell away.

Friends, like the apostles, we are called to be witnesses to Christ. Knowing that such allegiance will often cause strife among family and in the day in which we live, that is not abnormal.

It will cause strife among family, strife among friends, colleagues, and to a world that is becoming blatantly more and more pagan.

But we are called to stand for the truth of God. Even if that means loss of job, money, friends, or our own lives.

We are called to sacrifice all for the sake of the kingdom of God. We belong to God. We do not belong to the world any longer. This is not a time to be cowardly.

[7 : 48] We are to be people who confess our sins, who humble ourselves before the throne of God, who die to our own pride.

And then we are called to stand for the truth of God's word. Even if that means at great personal risk or our own lives.

We are called to die to self. So that Christ might be revealed in us and through us to the rest of the world.

In other words, our lives are to reflect the selfless life and offering of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Beloved, we are living in a world that is increasingly, becoming hostile to the ways of our Lord.

But ascension is the reminder that the war has already been won because Jesus reigns and he reigns now.

[9 : 00] And that reign shall never end. And although life can be difficult, it can be lonely, you are never alone. You have not been abandoned by our Lord.

The Holy Spirit imparts Jesus to you in the sacraments through the church. And now the Spirit wants to use you to be his witnesses to the world.

But you must be willing to die. You must be willing to die.

You must be willing to die to your ego, to yourself, so that Christ might live through you for the sake of others.

As we close, I want to leave you this morning with those important words from St. Paul, the Apostle Paul, from Colossians chapter 3, verses 2 through 4, where we read, Friends, that is our only enduring hope.

[10 : 43] And it's our joy. Even in the midst of great trials, tribulations, and even unto death.

Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, of the Holy Ghost. Amen.