

PASTOR'S PERSPECTIVE – ASCENSION - 'What do we see?'

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Dear Friends

The Easter Season Scripture readings on Sundays and during the week have, as it were, 'unpacked' the meaning and impact of Jesus' Resurrection and the development and experience of the Early Church. They have challenged us to look beyond some of our current understandings and structures to see an often different and in some ways simpler picture of a Church seeking its distinctive identity.

The Feast of the Ascension is a case in point. Celebration of the Ascension as a distinct feast was unknown in the first few centuries of the Church. While the '40 days' has a theological significance in a number of areas, the actual dating of the Ascension 40 days after the Resurrection is found only in the Acts of the Apostles. Taking Jesus' own words, we believe that he returned to the Father but the time and manner remain a mystery. The Synoptic Gospel accounts are not clear and it is quite possible that the Ascension occurred on Easter Day. Eventually, the Church accepted the universal observance of the Ascension which was for many years, and in some countries still is, on Thursday and a Holy Day of Obligation.

During the post-Easter period, we celebrate the Ascension, the Coming of the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, and the Body and Blood of Christ – great realities that are at the heart of our faith. How fortunate for our new converts as they experience these celebrations, and for our children too who are preparing to receive the Sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation on the Feast of Corpus Christi.

Whatever the timing and nature of the Ascension, the disciples did experience the presence of Jesus in their daily lives after the Resurrection. The Ascension was an important moment of growth for them where they had to let go of Jesus' familiar, physical presence. This is very much part of our lives when loved ones die or depart for a lengthy period. We wonder how we will manage without the intimacy of their physical presence – but, hard as it is, we do eventually manage, don't we?

With Jesus, there is always something more, something new. This mystery challenges us not to hold on to the physical Jesus but to let him go – so that his presence in our lives will be even more profound – in our hearts, in our neighbour, in the Body of Christ, in his Word, in the Eucharist.

The gift of Jesus is not for us to hold on to in a grasping way but a gift to be shared. How do we share this Good News of Jesus with the rest of the world? Firstly, we need to see Jesus where he really is. Recall the question of the two men in white to the apostles in Acts 1:10, '*Why are you men from Galilee*

***standing here looking into the sky?'* Jesus has returned to the Father but his living presence is here and now.**

What are we looking at? What do we see?

Fr Dave