Ascension B

May 13, 2018

St. Patrick’s

**“Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky?”**

As the Risen Jesus went up into the heavens, and a cloud took him from sight, well—the apostles stood there gawking up to the sky. Do you remember back last August, when we had the total eclipse and, with special sunglasses, many of us kept looking up to heavens, until our necks began to ache? That’s what it must have been like that glorious day when Christ went up to his heavenly Father’s right hand. The first disciples kept staring up there. Then, two heavenly messengers shook them from their focus on heaven, **“Hey, folks, why are you standing there looking at the sky?”** You see, the messengers agitated them to put their focus—not on heaven, but right here!

St. Patrick’s: In many ways the Ascension is like a relay race when the baton is passed on—from the ascended Christ to us (1). And that’s the crucial point of any race; you want a clean transfer of the baton. You don’t want to drop it. The ascended Christ has passed on the baton, and he sends us out—and, as we’ll celebrate next Sunday at Pentecost, we’re clothed **“with power from on high.”**

We don’t want to drop the baton.

Jesus has done his work on earth. Risen from the grave, and seen by those first eyewitnesses—then, he returned to the heavenly Father’s right hand. Now, he’s passed on the baton to all of us. If people out there, then, are going to see and experience the Risen Christ now, then often they’re going to do so in all of us, His body, all of us made members of His body in those saving waters of baptism. That’s God’s plan: The Risen Jesus, now gone from our sight, and folks are to see Him—precisely, in *all* of us.

On this feast of the Ascension, then, the Scriptures teach that the ascended Christ bestows on *all* of us varied gifts. Why?—as the Letter to the Ephesians puts it, **“to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”**

Amazing, isn’t it? The ascended Jesus makes us fully **“equipped…for building up the body of Christ.”** At a car dealership, the salesperson shows you a sleek new car and boasts, “Hey, it’s fully equipped!” The car has got everything you need, and there are gadgets you’re still trying to learn how to use.

Friends: Solemnly St. Paul exhorts that we be united, showing ourselves as the one Body of Christ in the world now. We all have diverse gifts, and fully equipped, we’re still trying to learn how to use all those gifts—together, in our everyday lives.

That’s why, next Sunday, as we celebrate the culmination of the Easter Season—Pentecost—we’re having our Ministry Fair here at St. Patrick’s. In recent months, a lot of you spoke up and said that you don’t have a clue what are the varied ministries in our St. Patrick community. This Sunday, you can read about them, and next Sunday—with display tables on one side of the church and all along the walkways, you’ll have a chance to plug into one or another ministry here, or re-commit to one you are involved with.

Three years ago I started having a longing to connect with a service that really would put me in contact with the poor. It wasn’t a gnawing feeling, but something to which I felt an attraction. After prayer, I brought it up to my spiritual director, and she told me that it would work out.

Now, I had enough on my plate, and I was timid about whether I’d be good at it. Then, I took a risk. I started putting a couple of hours weekly into the Manna House, down the street from the VA Hospital. Manna House offers hospitality to the homeless: giving the guests a chance for showers and clean clothes; needed hygiene items like soap and shampoo; and a great cup of coffee. At first, I felt like a fish out of water. Three years later, though, I know my life wouldn’t be as rich if I hadn’t plugged into this ministry.

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There is an old tale about what happened in heaven immediately after the Ascension. The Risen Jesus is met by myriads of angels as he returns to heaven. The angels ask him what will happen next on earth. He tells them how the world will be transformed into the kingdom of God. One of the angels asks Jesus how this will take place. The ascended Christ tells them about his followers and how they will spread the message and complete the mission he has begun. The angels look at one another, knowing about the fickleness of Simon Peter, the thunderous anger of John and James—and the hesitancy of many of us to take a risk. One of the angels then asks Jesus, “What’s your Plan B?” Christ tells them there isn’t one.

Sisters and Brothers: we’re his Plan A.

Jesus passes on the baton to us. Pray about your niche in service. Take a risk and plug into it. Clothed **“with power from on high,”** we’re really fully equipped to carry out his mission.

1. See Mark Link, S.J., Mission 2000: Praying Scripture in a Contemporary Way (Allen, Texas: Tabor Publishing, 1993), pg. 154.