

Hope on the Threshold



From today's Collect:

"Do not leave us comfortless, but send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us, and exalt us to that place where our Savior Christ has gone before"

On Thursday, the Church celebrated the Feast of the Ascension. After a time of his resurrected presence among the disciples, scripture attests to Christ's return to the Father. Soon after, the disciples will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. But in-between, they are without Jesus, and without the Holy Spirit. This seventh Sunday after Easter, just after the Ascension and before Pentecost, is our in-between time. We find ourselves with the disciples standing on the threshold.

Think back on times when you have been on the verge of something new. Maybe it was a life event: a marriage, having children, moving out of the home you've been in forever. You may be glad for the change, but unsure about what it might be like. You're looking forward to what awaits, but grieving what was. Being on the threshold is an exciting, scary time.

Living on the threshold, that liminal space between one life and the next, is a hallmark of being a Christian. The in-between is a place where anticipation borne of faith overcomes fear. The threshold is where hope thrives.

It can be hard to be a hopeful disciple of Jesus. If we believe that Christ has bought our salvation by the great great love of his death and resurrection, one look around at the state of the world today may cause us to question our sanity. And if we don't question ourselves, a hard-edged world most certainly will. Christians then and now get flak for holding fast to the love that *"bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."* (1 Corinthians 13:7)

We followers of Jesus live in two places. There's the world we see and hear with our eyes and ears. And there's the much greater reality that we feel in the depth of our soul. Jesus understands our predicament. As he is about to return to the Father, he prays:

"I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world." (John 17:15-16)

The world is a mixed bag. It is, after all, God's good creation filled with delights. We also know first-hand by our suffering that it is a broken place. John in his letter says *"God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."* (1 John 5:11) Yes, there is eternal life in Christ, but it seems, not quite yet.

We value stability and certainty. Standing on the threshold can be exciting from time to time, but as a way of life? Where can we find comfort in this in-between place? Where do we find the ground to hope?

In today's Gospel, Jesus, on the threshold of his Passion, prayed to the Father. Let his words be our guide.

"All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them." (John 17:10)

Take comfort in who we are. We are of God, radiating the glory of the risen Christ. We have been sanctified, made holy, in the truth of Jesus Christ. As we begin to emerge from the pandemic, we take great solace in the Eucharist, the sacrament that is the sign that we participate in Christ's glory.

"Jesus prayed for his disciples..."

The entirety of today's Gospel is Jesus in prayer. Take comfort in prayer. Prayer binds us to each other and to God. Offers assurance to soften the uncertainty and anxiety of being in this liminal space. Acts tells us that after the Ascension, the disciples *"were constantly devoting themselves to prayer."* (Acts 1:14) With all they'd been through, no wonder!

"As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." (John 17:18)

Take comfort that we have been commissioned. We have a job to do. Christ believes in us so much that he has sent us into the world in his footsteps. Acts tells us that our mission is to *"become a witness with [the apostles] to his resurrection."* (Acts 1:22).

On an uncertain threshold, it is good enough to know we are employed. The Holy Spirit will provide all the training we need. Jesus says that *"the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything..."* (John 14:16)

"I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves." (John 17:13)

Finally, take comfort in Christ's joy. Rejoice in the possibilities of the new creation borne of Christ's resurrection. The threshold is a place of anticipation and excitement. Those new things that have renewed our own lives - relationships, growing families, new vocations and adventures are but the first stirrings of God remaking the whole world in Christ.

Alive with the glory of Christ. Devotion to prayer. A job to do. And rejoicing in Christ's victory. These are our comfort. These are the building blocks of hope on the threshold of God's promise to reconcile all things in Christ.

Though on the threshold of new creation, the broken old one remains. Suffering is inevitable. In the pain of this "not quite yet" place, Jesus invites us to take up our cross and follow him. Bring our suffering to his own as he looks down on us with love from his cross. From his ascended glory. Be comforted by the embrace of our sisters and brothers who carry Christ's love in their hearts. And in our suffering, love the Christ in them in return. Suffering in the loving arms of Christ is the true breeding ground of Christian hope.

Jesus' last words were ones of hope and promise. This is from the appointed readings for Ascension Day, and is found a few verses earlier in Acts than today's reading:

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:6-8)

In the words of the ancient prayer Fr. David reminds me of: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Amen.