

Sunday May 29, 2022  
Ascension Sunday  
**Parishioner Reflection**

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This weekend we celebrate Ascension Sunday. We are forty days after the Resurrection of our Lord, and we hear that Jesus in the presence of his disciples was lifted up, “and a cloud took him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9) “he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:51) This is often viewed as the completion or exclamation point of the resurrection story.

As Christians we recognize it as a new event in its own right. One that marks the beginning of the Church’s active ministry of communicating the message of Christ to the world and bringing faith, ***being witnesses***, to the power of God. “and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) The Gospel today tells us that He left the disciples with great joy and hope, and that they returned to the temple blessing God. We too are left with joy. But we are also left with His grace and mercy, and at Pentecost, the gifts of the Holy Spirit. All these blessings empower us to continue Christ’s work on earth as we wait in joyful hope for his return.

As I drove around town last weekend, I was in complete awe of the extensive destruction that the storm and winds caused. Speaking with many different people I repeatedly heard “First the pandemic, and now this. This may be the end of times” and “One can’t help but wonder if we are being punished in some way!”

This ‘end of times’ idea is a common narrative that seems to surface when unprecedented crises arise and we try to make sense of devastating events. Perhaps it is perpetuated and amplified by Hollywood’s portrayal of Armageddon on the screen, or the picture that is painted through the great works of nonfiction that deal with the end of times. In almost all major religions the understanding of ‘judgement day’ has been shaped by scripture and religious texts. The Book of Revelation, the only apocalyptic book in the New Testament canon, occupies a central place in Christian eschatology (the doctrines concerning final judgement). The Greek word *apokalypsis*, means “unveiling” or “revelation”. Surely the imagery of the last book of the Bible could instill fear in even the most steadfast of readers, but why? Why do we fear? Is it because we consider ourselves bad? Awaiting, perhaps even expecting eternal punishment?

Why do we as Christians not look to the end of times with a longing for Christ's return? A time that as we have been promised, where the darkness will be lifted, and we will be united with the living God. This has always been a head scratcher for me. If we truly believe in the sacraments we share, Christ's return will be personal, visible and glorious. A blessed hope for which we should constantly watch and pray. After all, we are called to be witnesses.

What is a witness? By definition, a witness is one who has knowledge of an event or change, from personal observation or experience. The responsibility of a witness is to help clarify an event by telling everything they know about it. How are we Christian witnesses? We are witnesses to Christ when we live the hope of the resurrection and help others to do the same. We are witnesses sacramentally through the presence of the Holy Spirit but our faith must take on a practical form to actually be living as Christian witnesses. To be witnesses to all that Christ came to give us, to teach us, and leave us with.

It is simply not enough to believe in Christ if we do not live out his love. We need to uphold the life and dignity of His people, like being attentive to the needs of our elders in long term care and ensuring the quality of care they receive does not continue to decline. It means caring for the poor and ensuring that there are proper social systems in place that support individuals in need, families who are financially struggling, and families who are struggling with children with special needs. It means standing with the persecuted and giving voice to the marginalized like our many First Nations communities who are still without clean drinking water and proper healthcare in 2022. It means protecting and cherishing all of God's creation and being true stewards of the earth as we are called to be. We are not witnesses at all and are hardly communicating Christ's message effectively or continuing his work on earth if we turn a blind eye to any of these issues. Being a witness involves both who we are and what we do and is reflected in the choices we make.

Brothers and Sisters: I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you. (Ephesians 1:17-19)

