

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Eastertide (A)

17<sup>th</sup> May 2020

'Longing for the Lord'

Acts 8: Philip in Samaria; Peter & John confirm with HSp.

Ps 32: *I will tell what He did for my soul*

1Pt 3: *In the Spirit He was raised to life ...*

Jn 14: 15–21: *the Father will give you another Advocate, ... that Spirit of Truth ...*

In the Gospel today, from Jn ch.14, our Lord is preparing the apostles for two things, I would say: firstly for His Ascension, and secondly for Pentecost. In these words of His at the Last Supper, He is indicating a going-away, and a return: a withdrawing from their sight, but a consolation: "*I will not leave you orphans; I will come back to you.*"

As we draw towards the end of Eastertide — these final 2 wks — we have the forthcoming feasts of Ascension (Thursday) & Pentecost (2 wks' time). These celebrations express the reality of Our Lord's 'going-away' and His 'coming back.' Both are powerful and evocative occasions: try to think yourself into those scenes with the apostles: standing on the hilltop watching the Lord Jesus disappear from view, knowing that you'd never see His face on earth again; then, 10 days later, sealed up in a room, to experience the indescribable spiritual influx of the Holy Spirit, and know that the Lord Jesus was truly with His Church. These

great occasions which followed on from the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus remind us what a tumultuous time it was for the apostles, in that first-ever Easter season! Those 7 wks, from Passover to Pentecost, encompassing all these great mysteries, allowed the apostles to experience not only the sacrificial love of Jesus at first hand, but also — just as important — to know that His promises were fulfilled, His words were reliable, His truth and love were for ever. When they heard Him say at the Last Supper, "*I will not leave you orphans; I will come back to you,*" they couldn't at that point have understood the full implications. They didn't even know at that point that within a short while he'd be arrested. How could they yet understand what he meant by 'going away' from them, or 'coming back'? But, as the Gospels often say, later they understood, they remembered that He had said this to them and they believed.

As we contemplate keeping these feasts, as we have kept all of the past few weeks — the end of Lent, the commemorations of Holy Week, the Sacred Easter Triduum, and the first 5 wks of Eastertide — in other

words, remotely, online, away from the public celebration of the Church and our fellow parishioners and friends, what might we hold on to? What might we cling to, for hope, as we prepare to keep the Ascension & Pentecost?

Well, surely it's the fact of the *power*, and the *truth*, of all that Jesus ever said and did: whatever was cast at Him in His earthly life, yet His divine majesty overcame it, humbly, but truly. The horror of mankind's worst moment in history, the killing of the Son of God, was met by God's ever-loving response. He took it, He 'soaked up' the hatred, and in return He offered us the life we really needed, free of sin, and filled with His gift of life in the Spirit, life that lasts into eternity. The Ascension of Jesus, and the Pentecost outpouring of the Spirit, celebrate these incomparable gifts of Jesus to humanity, and cause our hearts to yearn for that closeness to the Son of God that makes sense of a human life. Feeling that there's something missing in life is part of life, as it were. A real grasp on life is to know that there's more beyond, for which we long. The Ascension of Jesus to heaven, and His gift of the Spirit from His Father in

heaven, help us to be oriented towards heaven. Those gifts of the Spirit excite within us that longing for heaven.

So: this time when we are separated from our praying community, when we are separated from the sacraments and from one another, and when we are unable to celebrate the Christian mysteries in many of the customary ways, is also a time to be reminded of the yearning that Jesus brings to our life ... a yearning not for the here-and-now, but for the beyond; a longing that is wholesome and positive, for that which the world cannot bring, but that *He promises*. As we prepare to keep the Ascension later this week, and as we begin to pray for that ever-needed outpouring of the Spirit, let's allow ourselves in this time we have been given — this slower time of lockdown 'downtime' — to feel the longing, to sense the incompleteness and the transitoriness, the contingency of this life, ... and know that Jesus's promises proved true for the apostles, and are just as true for us. Let us long for the Spirit that gives us faith, and allows our hearts to rest content in the truth that Jesus is Lord of all, He is Lord even of this time of crisis ...

*17 The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him — You know Him, because He abides with you, and He will be in you!*

*18 I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.*