

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
The Ascension of the Lord, May 24, 2020, Cycle A

With the Solemnity of the Ascension, we have now completed 40 some days of Easter. 40 is a symbolic number for the faith traditions of Jesus and Christians. Moses spends 40 days on Mount Sinai to receive the Law from God, the ancient Hebrews spent 40 years in the desert before they could enter the Promised Land, and Jesus himself spent 40 days in the desert facing temptation before embarking upon his mission of proclaiming God's Kingdom. As Luke begins his second volume of his work, the Acts of the Apostles, he tells us after the crucifixion, Jesus presented himself as alive to his disciples, appearing to them for over 40 days.

40 being symbolic represents the amount of the Kairos time required to accomplish a divine project. Thus 40 represents that full time for Jesus to finish his teaching about the Kingdom of God and to commission his disciples to go forth and continue his work to be the church.

40 days is also the amount of time we spend in Lent. Unfortunately, in the Western Church, we don't give this season of joy – the 40 days from Easter to Ascension - the same kind of attention we give Lent. It is a little like our wedding traditions – no? We put immense emphasis on preparing clothes and rings, flowers, attendants and the reception. But the years the couple spend living out the truth of their vows are treated like a ho-hum sequel. So, too, our Easter Season: we can spend hours celebrating an Easter Vigil, and celebrating Easter Day, but come Easter, and we return to living our lives as if we were living in a pre-resurrection world – and maybe even more so in this year of the coronavirus pandemic and COVID-19.

This year with cycle A, we read Matthew's version of the Ascension scene for our Gospel passage. It seems Matthew hits the nail on the head for us. He says: "When they saw him (Risen Jesus), they worshipped, but they doubted." After 40 days of the Risen Jesus revealing himself to them, they still doubted! That their familiar teacher had divine status strains their belief or somehow things seem a letdown! Things don't seem changed yet. IS it not the same with us – we modern day disciples? Yes, we do worship the Risen Lord, like the early disciples, but we also doubt. It is nearly impossible to sustain our Easter joy in a world that is still reigned over, by calamity, tragedy and pandemics! We worship, but we doubt! Luke in Acts has the disciples saying "Lord, are you going to restore the Kingdom to Israel now!"

The Good News is that Jesus does not ask for perfect faith, only little faith; like those early disciples had on that Ascension Mount. Jesus knows that we have doubts because, death, calamity, and devastation still surrounds us. But, Jesus also knows we will come to believe in the Easter Miracle more and more, and become stronger and stronger disciples if we truly live our lives, believing that Jesus really has overcome death and this tragic world. Thus Jesus commissions us: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations," with your gift of a "little faith." Trust "I am with you always, until the age of the age." Even through the calamity of the dreaded coronavirus.