

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Ascension of the Lord, May 15-16, 2021, Cycle B

Thus we come to the Solemnity of the Risen Lord's Ascension. Our 50 day Easter Celebration is now almost over. Next Sunday we celebrate Pentecost – the fiftieth and last day of Easter - commemorating the gift of the Spirit that empowers us to be the church – the Body of Christ – continuing the mission of Jesus.

As we celebrate the Ascension, it might be good to reflect on some of the symbolic language used in our first scripture passage from the Acts of the Apostles. The Acts' account of the Ascension of Jesus is read every year on the feast of Ascension – no matter whether we are on cycle A, B, or C. It is important to note that the person who wrote the Gospel of Luke also wrote the Acts of the Apostles – and both books are addressed to a certain Theophilus. The author begins Acts by saying: "In the first book Theophilus, I dealt with all that Jesus did and taught until the day he was taken up...". "Theophilus" means "Beloved of God," and for this reason scholars believe Theophilus may not necessarily be a particular person. Meaning "Beloved of God" the name Theophilus allows everyone who hears or reads Luke's Gospel or Acts to insert him/herself into the role of the "beloved of God." In other words, the author of the Gospel of Luke and Acts is addressing himself to you and me. You and I are "Theophilus" – "the beloved of God".

The number 40 the author of Acts uses is also symbolic; representing a period of transition from one way of being to another way of being. The author says about the Risen Lord: "He presented himself alive to them...appearing to them during forty days and speaking to them about the Kingdom of God." 40 are the days Moses spent on Mount Sinai. 40 are the years the ancient Israelites sojourned in the Desert. 40 are the Days Jesus spent in the desert after his baptism to prepare for his public ministry. And, therefore, 40 are the days the disciples prepare to be baptized with the Holy Spirit and begin their public ministry – witnessing to the Risen Christ.

The Ascension of Jesus, then, marks the point at which the followers of Jesus are commissioned with the mission begun by Jesus. Jesus says:

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witness...to the ends of the earth."

Even given the gift of the spirit, we disciples still have questions – like when will Jesus come back and when will the end time come, but now is not the time to answer all our questions fully: "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority." There can be no idle looking up into the sky, wondering when Jesus will return! The two men dressed in white said: "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking into the sky"? In other words, you have work to do – Now is the time to go forth and proclaim the Good News to all creatures. Thus we pray over the next week for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon us and empower to fulfill our mission to be Church – to teach and spread the Gospel of Jesus.