

Today we celebrate feast of the Ascension of our Lord into heaven. The Scriptures tell us that for about 40 days after his resurrection, Christ appeared to his disciples on a number of occasions, sometimes just to one person, sometimes to a group of disciples, and on one occasion to more than 500 people, as St Paul reports.

Then after about 40 days these post-resurrection appearances ceased, and the disciples realised that Jesus had returned to the Father, as he promised – he had ascended into heaven.

Their immediate reaction to his absence was a feeling of being lost, confused, unsure what to do – they just stood there ‘looking into the sky’ as St Luke tells us in today’s first reading.

But one thing they did remember was that the Lord had promised to send them the Holy Spirit, and that they must wait until the Spirit comes, and then it will be time to act. As Jesus says, *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judea and Samaria and indeed to the ends of the earth* (Acts 1:8).

The feast of Pentecost that we celebrate next Sunday is all about going out and proclaiming the Good News to all of creation, it is about mission, action, fire.

But the message of the feast of the Ascension that we celebrate today is all about waiting – waiting for the Spirit of God to come, waiting for the right moment to begin a mission, or whatever.

And we need to highlight the importance of waiting in the Christian life. Sometimes we think that the Christian life is all about action, of doing good deeds. That is important, yes, but equally important are those times of waiting, of allowing something to mature. Waiting times can be very fruitful – a time for prayer, a time of review, a time to rest and relax, a time to de-clutter – materially, psychologically, spiritually.

There are many situations where it is important that we wait to receive the Spirit of God before acting. If we move too quickly we may be responding to another spirit that is not of God – maybe the spirit of revenge, or the spirit of jealousy or envy, or frustration, or fear. One of those spirits may be driving us and if it is, the consequences of our action will probably not be good.

If, for example, we need to correct someone, the only place from which we can do it is the place of love. And we must wait for the Spirit of love to come. And then, in love, we can correct.

Next Sunday, Pentecost, the Holy Spirit will send us out on mission to bring the Good News to the ends of the earth. But may this week be a quieter week – a week of waiting – as we pray with Mary and the disciples gathered in the Upper Room: ‘Come, O Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.’

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