

My parents traveled to St. Petersburg about 4 months before we moved there from Philadelphia. They took my older sisters with them on that trip and were away for about four days. I thought it was incredibly unjust that they didn't take me or any of my brothers with them. While we were stuck in the frigid north during the month of February, I visualized my parents and sisters lounging on the beach or visiting various tourist attractions in the area. But their trip was (mostly) business. They checked out the high school my older brother and I would attend. They met with the school counselor to get an idea of the classes we could take and if we were eligible for any honors courses. They toured a number of houses for sale, seeing which one would best fit our large family. And they tried to find a home that would be convenient to stores and parks, as well as a neighborhood that would be filled with young people our age.

Their hard work paid off. They found a beautiful home in a lovely neighborhood. There were lots of families with children our age who lived just a few houses away. In fact, there was a family of 11 who lived just three houses away. One of those children became my best friend.

All that happened because my parents and sisters went away. They used that time together to benefit our entire family. And the good work they did affects me and my siblings even to this day.

On its surface, the ascension of Jesus which we commemorate today doesn't make much sense. Why would the Lord seemingly

abandon his disciples whom he had been forming for three years? But the ascension of Jesus reminds us that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one. They have existed for all time. And they are meant to be together. As such, they work together for all people and for all time. In the same way that my parents and sisters went away to benefit our entire family, God the Father, Son, and Spirit work together in order that all people throughout every age will be blessed.

In a specific way, we experience the fruit of the Trinity's labors when we gather to worship. God is present to us and his grace continues to work in us when we listen to his Word at Mass, when we receive the very life of God in each of the sacraments, and as we put that grace into practice caring for our sisters and brothers.

Jesus' ascension into heaven isn't a departing from us. It is a more intense im-parting of God's life and grace to us. Rather than finding God in just one geographical place, Jesus' ascension enables God to minister to his faithful in all places, through every age, and in a variety of ways. This is the first implication of the ascension.

When my parents returned home to my brothers and me, they hoped that their trip and the work they did would affect every member of our family for the better. I'm sure they hoped that their work would bear fruit in my sisters, brothers, and me - not just in the immediate future but for all time.

The grace of God which the Father, Son, and Spirit pour out upon us is something that should bear fruit in us as well.

I recently listened to an interview of a young woman who was returning home after a mission trip to Africa. While at the airport, awaiting to board her flight home, she and her small group decided to get something to eat. She was hungry, because there was little to no food offered to the group while they did their work. She ordered a big plate of pasta. As she began eating, one member of the group started to get sick. Another member of the group, a paramedic, realized just how seriously ill this person was. He told the group they had to rush this person to the hospital. All the while, the young woman could only think about her pasta. While they were trying to help this person, she used that time to ask for a box for her food and kept the box on her lap hoping she could finally eat it when they got to the hospital. In the interview, she talked about the shame she felt over this episode and how selfishly she acted. It was a pivotal moment for her. Because of that experience, she said she would always make sure that, from that moment forward, helping others would be her first priority. It was just several months later that her newfound commitment was put to the test. At the airport one day, someone fell and was badly injured. The person hit their head and was unconscious. Although she was trying to get to her plane for a flight that was to leave shortly, she stopped to help the person. She said she didn't care about her luggage, her phone just lying there which anyone could take, or even making her flight. The most important thing was helping the person in need. Her life had changed so that doing something, doing anything to help another in need was most important.

In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we hear about the ascension of Jesus. The angels who appeared in that spectacular moment make a statement to the dumbfounded

disciples as they watch Jesus ascend into heaven. They say, “why are you standing (here) looking up at the sky?” In a sense, I hear those angels saying, “you need to do something! Anything!”

By virtue of his ascension, Jesus sends us his Spirit. It is the Spirit that animates us and gives us courage...the courage to do the Father’s will.

As we come to Mass and as we participate in the sacraments, God fills our hearts with his grace. That grace isn’t given to us just to make us feel good or to help us revel in his mercy. Instead, we are to do something with that grace. We are to make our Church, our community, and our world better. We can’t just stand around staring into the heavens saying, “oh good. Now I’m saved.” As disciples of Jesus, we are called to share God’s life and love with the world.

This solemnity of the ascension is a reminder that as Jesus, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit are one in heaven, so too is our true home in heaven with them. In addition, this solemnity reminds us that the notion of “faith” is more verb than it is noun. True faith is something that is practiced. Real faith is something that is lived out. Today, the angels tell us the same thing they said to the disciples almost 2,000 years ago – do something, do anything which shows your faith is alive and that Christ is alive in you.

Amen? Amen!