

FEAST OF THE ASCENSION

As Jesus spoke to his disciples at the Last Supper to his impending death, they were afraid because he was leaving them, and perhaps even abandoning them completely. Then he was crucified, and they hid themselves out of fear that they would be the next ones put to death. So they were greatly surprised and their relief was huge when he was raised from the dead and he appeared to them in the upper room. He continued to show himself to them after the resurrection for forty days, so that they would know that he was the same person who had been with them for three years; and yet he was transformed; he was different.

Finally he left them and he returned to his Father, leaving behind the earthly limitations of space and time. There were no more special appearances in his new risen body. He promised one more gift, an immersion into his own Spirit, and we prepare ourselves each year for the fresh baptism of that same Spirit-gift at Pentecost which we celebrate next week.

As he prepared to go, he reminded them of what he had taught. He was not gone, he had not left them alone. He told them, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father."

So when we are united with Christ, we must be able to point to the same reality, so that we can say "when you see me, you see Jesus." That is what it means to be immersed in Christ and baptized in his Spirit. "When you see me, you see Jesus."

But Jesus also pointed to himself in another way—he said, "When you see the hungry and thirsty and when you see the homeless and the refugee, then you also are seeing me; when you see the sick person who is homebound or the inmate who is jailed, then you also are seeing me."

Yes, he has gone before as he promised to make a dwelling place for us; but we are not abandoned. Christ is here in our baptized brothers and sisters; he is also here in the people around us who are need of kind attention and assistance.

This is very hard to do, but it's not expected that we do this on our own—it is the Spirit of the risen Christ who makes a dwelling place in us, who enables us to respond in a compassionate manner as Jesus himself did.

Then we can begin to see this cosmic reality – the risen Christ, and ourselves united with him, living in one another so that when others see us, they see Christ; and the risen Christ is dwelling in the sick and tired and lost and neglected, and we see Christ in them as well.

After all, are we really so different from one another?