

Ascension of Christ '18

"He ascended means he also descended into the lower regions of the earth"

The love of God protects us from nothing as it sustains us in everything

Today is Ascension "Sunday," Mother's Day, and my first weekend back here in St. Mary. What do all these have in common? Let's begin with the Feast of the Ascension.

The Ascension of Christ began, as the scriptures say, with his descending to the "lower regions of earth." Commentators say this is not a geographical designation as a way of saying that Christ experienced the depths of human suffering. His descent was the beginning of his ascent. Every ascent bears/carries the marks of a previous descent. This is the pattern for all of creation. Religion calls this ascension, science calls this evolution, families call this growing up. The Feast of the Ascension is not just about Jesus, it's about all of us.

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I experienced this pattern of descending into ascent during these past eight weeks. On Monday, March 18th, I fell asleep driving home from a service and went off the road up on the right bank. My next stop was Tillamook hospital, then the Trauma Center at Immanuel Hospital in Portland, and then Cedar Sinai Rehabilitation in Beaverton.

The time for me during this time was principally "ascent." The care I received was excellent, aided by the many visitors, cards and phone calls I received. All along I experienced a sense of consolation that this whole thing was taking me some place, though I didn't know where. It was a real sense of ascent.

Then I went to the Sacred Heart Jesuit Convalescent Center in Los Gatos, California, for three weeks. It is the place for Jesuits on the West Coast to go who are either recovering their health or are releasing it into the hands of God. The care there is excellent and loving, offering every kind of service and attention from healthcare to sociability to entertainment, including taking the residents to a local

opera and even a horse race in Berkeley. That's where I went. I want you to know I won \$18.40. We even had our picture taken with the winning jockey. And - the food is wonderful.

But I soon discovered that the Jesuit Center was not a place of recovery. These are mostly old Jesuits who have borne the beautiful heat of ministry for decades, from university presidents to freshman high school teachers. There is no physical recovery there, no physical healing to previous health.

So I wondered - where is the ascent here? Then I read an article titled, "*He Does Not Forget*," by Jerry Ryan in *Commonweal Magazine*, May 4, 2018. Jerry, who has been a Little Brother of Jesus for 59 years, read about another Little Brother who suffered a stroke and volunteered to move into a Nursing Home to ease the burden of his elderly care-giving Little Brothers. He writes:

"When I chose these elderly as my companions for the rest of my life, I knew it was essential to feel some of the affection Jesus has for them and not just get along with them. The Gospel says Jesus gave thanks to his Father for having taught him how to enrich us with his poverty, for the way in which the kingdom of God is established by the poor and the humble.

"The people in this nursing home are the bearers of humanity's profound poverty, and they are the living guardians of theological hope. These are the places from which the prayers of the poor rise up to the Father because they are accompanied by their lives, their tiredness, their drudgery, their helplessness, their poverty. God wants us to join them to receive from them, to learn from them. Christ chose what was common and contemptible in this world, including the apparent tedium of old age, to reduce to nothing all that seems so important to us, including youth and physical beauty."

It started clicking for me. These older brother Jesuits are the bearers of my profound poverty. They are the living guardians of my theological hope. Their prayers rise up to the Father, accompanied by their tiredness, their helplessness, their poverty. God wants me to join them to receive from them, to learn from them. Christ is choosing for me what is contemptible in this world - the tedium of old age. I am beginning to see myself as one who can share with them their hope in God's revelation, waiting, patiently and prayerfully, for whatever will happen in the fullness of time. This was the most powerful Ascent I experienced during these past eight weeks - right there in the middle of all that descent, which made my ascent all the more powerful.

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Today is Mother's Day. The life of mothering surely involves descending as it does of ascending. And yet the descent of suffering is also the ascent of love. What greater gift can there be than to show loved ones that the descent of giving simply comes out of the ascent of loving. Mothers, you especially are the guardians of our theological hope and love. You show us that "the love of God protects us from nothing as it sustains us in everything."

THANK YOU!

This is true for all of us. We are all witnesses to the Ascension whenever we help lift anyone from fear to trust, from despair to hope, and from alienation to love.

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Happy Feast of the Ascension - Everyone!