

The Vigil and Feast of the Ascension of the Lord/
Year A/(Memorial Day Weekend)/Recognition of
Graduates ~ 27/28 May 2017 ~
Our Lady of Victory Parish Community ~
Homily

1st Reading:

Acts 1:1-11

- “. . . . I dealt with all that Jesus did and taught until the day he was taken up, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them . . . While meeting with them, he enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for “the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak; for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?” . . . But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem . . . and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this . . . he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight. . . . This Jesus who has been taken up . . will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven.”

Responsorial Psalm:

Psalm 47 - *Sung*

2nd Reading:

Ephesians 1:17-23

- “May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.”

GOSPEL:

MATTHEW 28:16-20

- “The eleven disciples **went** to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When **they saw** him, **they worshiped**, but **they doubted**. . . . “**Go**, therefore, and **make disciples** of all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe** all that I have commanded you. “And behold, **I am with you always, until the end of the age.**”

i. The Gospel for this Feast is short . . . and to the point . . . and in many respects provides a scene . . . recalls an experience . . . for the disciples . . . yes . . . but perhaps for each of us as well, that, as we look back on our lives, is ever so familiar . . . for each of us has known and experienced times when what seemed to be “comfortable” was no longer so . . . The routine we had settled into . . . was changed . . . and it resulted in us floundering, perhaps, at times . . . trying to get our bearings and regain some control . . . some familiarity.

What was comfortable for the disciples . . . having the Lord around to answer questions, give directions . . . provide comfort . . . offer hope . . . what was familiar . . . now . . . was disappearing from their sight.

The Evangelist Matthew tells us, as part of this “mountain top” scene . . . the mountain . . . always a place in the Scriptures where there is some “divine” revelation . . . is that these disciples, “When they saw him, they worshiped, **but** . . . **but** they doubted . . . The Evangelist Matthew never explains what the doubt is . . . You and I can only speculate . . . but the mere act of worship certainly tells of their great love . . . their great devotion . . . their absolute faith and trust in the Lord . . .

And, Jesus final command to them, in turn, tells them that **HIS** work . . . in and through them . . . in and through those who will follow . . . in and through **US** . . . is **NOT** yet done: “**Go**, therefore, and **make disciples** of all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe** all that I have commanded you. “And behold, **I am with you always, until the end of the age.**”

ii. That is why we are here . . . to be made disciples ourselves . . . so that we can be faithful to the Lord’s command to **go** and do that of others . . . That is the primary reason God has **called** us to this place . . . at this time . . . for this purpose . . . as I shared last weekend . . . and **behold** . . . **He continues to be with us . . . in many ways . . . just as He promised.**

Again, the mere fact that we are here is a **beginning** . . . it is our response to God that says, “O.K. . . . Yes . . .”

But more is needed if we are to be formed and shaped into a **Mass of worshippers** . . . in **this** Liturgy . . . **this** celebration of Eucharist . . . **this** Mass . . . Yes, more **is** needed if we are to be formed into disciples who form other disciples . . . as God continues to speak, and we are invited to continue to respond . . .

So, the lights went full on and there **was** that familiar voice welcoming us and inviting us to join in singing the “Entrance Chant”, **but**, the **“Introductory Rites”** . . . the actions we enter into go beyond this. . . . and over the centuries have developed into what we experience with the intention of not only helping to provide some “definitive” starting point . . . but provide some “initial experience of prayer.”

The “rites”, as found in our “Missal” . . . our “play-book” . . . are specific and ordered.

They begin with an “Entrance” . . . a **Procession** of some of the ministers of the Liturgy . . . lay and ordained . . . generally, along with a sung Psalm, or Hymn or other liturgical song.

It **is** the **“Procession”** . . . with particular and specific elements that are a part of it, that moves **deliberately** forward, **toward** what is a key focus for all gathered . . . the Sanctuary . . . for it is **here, in the Sanctuary** that the Word is proclaimed . . . **here**, that the Prayers are **led** . . . **here**, that the Sacrifice of the Lord is **made new** . . . **here**, where so many of our encounters with Christ in the Sacraments happen . . . so it is **here** that our **attention must be directed**.

It is the “**Procession**”, along with the “**Entrance Chant**” . . . that serves to “open the celebration . . . foster unity among those gathered and set the tone for not only the mystery we celebrate . . . but the particular liturgical event . .

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Again, remember when I spoke of the sporting events last weekend . . . the introduction of the “Star Spangled Banner” that instinctively, brings everyone to their feet . . . eyes searching for the American Flag; hand over their heart and singing or even speaking the words to this patriotic hymn . . . The “**Procession**” becomes that for us gathered in prayer.

Now, I also realize that we, like many, many other churches of all denominations, have been gifted with persons who can see through closed books . . . gifted with “Superman” eyes . . . I believe this to be true since no matter how warm and inviting the person who announces before all of this happens, “Please, join in singing . . . such and such in such and such book” . . . there are those who don’t even need to open the book . . . and, for that matter . . . don’t utter a sound. **Unity** can be **fostered** among those gathered . . . but for it to become real, it needs to be entered into by **all** gathered.

~~— I recall the strong comments made over the past many~~

~~months about sporting events where athletes and others made very public decisions to not stand during the National Anthem . . . not **sing** during the National Anthem. From many there was a great deal of public outrage.~~

As we join our many voices into becoming one in our prayer of **song, we** . . . each of us . . . is invited to focus on a **Crucifix** that leads us . . . a reminder of the one who gave of His life so that we might have life. At times, much like this weekend, **Incense** will precede this Crucifix . . . the use of Incense having a varied history in our Worship . . . but in the 11th century, becoming very much a part of the Roman Rite, . . . an expression of reverence and prayer in itself, as we find in Psalm 140 as well as in the Book of Revelation. . . . **our** reverence . . . **our** prayer . . . rising to the heavens . . . rising to our God.

Adding to not just the “solemnity” of the liturgy, but also the festive nature of what we do, candles are to be carried with the processional Crucifix or Cross between them . . . followed by any other Servers, with the **Gospel Book**, . . . the **Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ** . . . once again to be proclaimed in our midst . . . reverently and respectfully carried in by either a Deacon, or, in his absence, a Lector, with the Priest/ Presider being the last in procession. . .

iii. So, just why the “pomp” and “ceremony”, as some

might call this “procession”, itself, having a varied history in the development of liturgy . . . the celebration of Eucharist . . . the Mass . . . over the centuries?

While an answer would be that God is deserving of this, and so much more, in our worship . . . worship done well and reverently . . . the truth is . . . God does not depend on our worship . . . **we** do . . . for it is our worship that changes us . . . shapes us . . . molds us . . . reminds us that we are becoming something more and we are headed to something beyond this moment . . . this very life. The **Procession** is “not just a functional action of “introducing” the Priest nor the other ministers.” . . . And it definitely is not to showcase the latest in “liturgical fashion” . . . But, it **is** very much a “visible expression” of those gathered to “**become** a liturgical community, together as a people gathered in response to God’s invitation . . . giving a visible manifestation to each of us who form the Body of Christ . . . a people called to holiness . . . a people to be **formed** into disciples.

The **Introductory Rites** also include: a reverencing and veneration of the Altar . . . an action that found its way into the Liturgy by the 4th Century, understanding the Altar to be the very “table of the Lord . . . our communal table of sacrifice . . . whereby we enter into the Paschal banquet anew . . . for it is also a symbol of Christ and the whole Christian community gathered . . . the ultimate place from which the

summit of our prayer takes place . . . and ascends to God . . . the presiding Priest, venerating this **rock** in the name of all gathered.

Historically, constructed of stone symbolizing Christ as the cornerstone and spiritual rock of the Church, as the Church continued to grow, the relics of martyrs were placed beneath the Altar. . . . reminiscent of a time in the early Church when, because of persecution, the faithful would gather in the catacombs to celebrate Eucharist, and the stone tombs of the Martyrs would be used as the Altar.

With the persecution of the early Christians ending, and now relics placed beneath the Altar . . . the “kiss” of the Altar by the presiding Priest came to be understood as a greeting of the saints . . . the Church triumphant . . . gathered with the earthly Church in prayer.

In **our** Altar, we have the relics of Saints Donatus and Innocent . . . 9th century western European Bishops, martyred for their faith . . .

Once the presiding Priest arrives at the Chair from which he will lead the gathered assembly in prayer, these **Introductory** Rites continue . . . The Sign of the Cross, Greeting, and Introduction; The Penitential Act, Kyrie, or, **Sunday Renewal of Baptism**, the latter “especially at

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Easter Time”, as encouraged by the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*; the Glory to God; concluding with the **Collect**, perhaps more popularly known as the “Opening Prayer” . . .

All of these with which, not only a rich history and development, but **steeped** in meaning . . . we will explore next weekend.