

The Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord: The Lord Ascends, His Power Descends

Let's begin today with Moses. You all know the events of Moses' life and the way in which he led the people not just out of Egypt but to the Lord. Moses didn't just defeat the Pharaoh of Egypt, he gave the people the Law of God. He brought them to the border of the Promised Land. The thirty-fourth chapter of the *Book of Deuteronomy* relates that Moses was 120 years old when he died. Ten years for each of the tribes of Israel. Moses' life revealed the work of God. Just before Moses died he laid his hands upon Joshua, his closest aide. Joshua was filled with spirit and wisdom and the people obeyed him and did as the Lord commanded. And following Joshua's commands, the walls of Jericho fell down.

Now let's move on to Elijah. Elijah was the greatest and most powerful of all the prophets up to his time. He called a famine upon the people due to their embracing pagan ways. He defeated the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel in splendid fashion, and then called down rain. You can read all about Elijah in *First and Second Book of Kings*. Towards the end of Elijah's life, a man named Elisha became his closest follower and aide. Elijah knew his time on earth was ending and asked Elisha what he could do for him. His aide asked for a double portion of the prophet's spirit. Elijah said that this is difficult, but if you see me being taken up into heaven, then a double spirit will indeed rest on you. Suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire came between the two, and Elijah was swept up by a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha called out to his master. When he could see him no longer, he picked up Elijah's mantle that had fallen and calling upon the power of Elijah he struck the water of the River Jordan, and the river parted in two. Elisha continued on in the power of Elijah.

In today's first reading, in the Acts of the Apostles, and repeated in today's Gospel, Jesus appears to his disciples. His body is not a resuscitated corpse. He appears in the power and might of God. He ascends into heaven and, just as in the case of Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, His Power descends upon the disciples who will now become apostles. Jesus' Power is the Holy Spirit.

Two men are watching the disciples gazing up into heaven. "Men of Galilee," they ask, "Why are you standing there looking up at the sky?" Who are these two men? Are the angels? Perhaps. Perhaps they are the same two men who appeared on the Mountain when Jesus was transfigured, and the disciples witnessed the Lord's power. You remember these men: Moses and Elijah. You remember what they discussed: how God's plan for the Kingdom of God would be carried out by Jesus in Jerusalem. In the Gospel of Luke's account of Easter, there were also two men who appeared to the women at the tomb on Easter Sunday. Perhaps these two also were Moses and Elijah asking the women why they sought the living among the dead.

It is not the physically weak and dying Lord of Good Friday who ascends into

heaven. It is the Powerful Judge of the Living and the Dead. And just as Elisha and Joshua were not just simple observers of their masters' departure, but continued their work, the disciples now continue Jesus' work in His Spirit and with His Spirit.

We have not been called by Christ simply to be observers of His Life. We have not been called simply to be historians. We have been called to continue His Power. Joshua called on the Lord and the walls of Jericho fell down. Elisha called on the Lord, and Elijah's Spirit was felt to such an extent that a general in a neighboring country, Naaman, heard about Elisha and traveled to Jerusalem seeking a cure for his leprosy. We have been called to continue the work of the Lord. We can call upon the Lord, and his Power will work through us to transform the world into the Kingdom of Love.

This is the time of year that people are listening to speeches at high school and college graduations. Invited guests, principals and valedictorians tell the graduates to build on their last four years and use their education to make the world a better place. This is great. The Ascension can be understood in the same terms. We have been brought from spiritual childhood to assume an adult responsibility in the Kingdom of God. The analogy ends there, though. We are not dependent upon what we have learned. We have so much more. We luxuriate in the Presence and Power of God.

We are Joshuas. We are Elishas. We are the disciples who have been entrusted with the Spirit of God to serve His People.

Sometimes loneliness overwhelms us. It overwhelms everyone at times. Sometimes we think about our mistakes, our sins, and we become despondent. Everyone at some time or other asked himself or herself, "How could a person like me, a person who is inclined to sin do God's work?" Everyone suffers from crippling guilt at times in his or her life. Everyone makes the mistake of letting the past destroy the present and eliminate the future. When we feel we are all alone, when we feel that we are not good enough, we need to remember that Jesus did not ascend and then leave us destitute. No, He left us with His Power, His Presence, His Life. And he didn't leave us to spend the rest of our lives contemplating our belly buttons. No, He empowers us to bring His Presence to all, beginning with our families and then extending to the entire world.

Moses' hands were laid upon Joshua; Elijah's mantle fell upon Elisha; and the Holy Spirit descended from the Father and Son. May we have the courage to continue the Work of God.