

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

7 Easter, Feast of the Ascension  
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**“Learning to Cope with Hope”**

For several weeks now in the Gospel readings Jesus has been preparing his Apostles and Disciples for his departure from them. Departures are always difficult from the first day your parent leaves you at the school gate, till the day you leave school forever. Leaving college after three or four years with the same group of people is not much better especially since you normally never see them again.

The Ascension of Jesus marks such a departure. Jesus' mission is complete and he leaves his disciples to live out their lives without him. We know how difficult a parting it is, because all of Jesus' prayers are for his disciples. He prays to the Father for each one of them and he prays that his Spirit may be with them to give strength that will allow them to endure.

In this departure, Jesus calls for a union of Spirit between himself, his Father and his disciples. In doing so he passes on his mission to his Apostles and to his church.

Perhaps, he senses their apprehension and fear, the way parents do when they send the kids off to college. Are they going to be okay? Will they cope? Make sure you phone. Do you have everything that you need?

After 40 years, or rather 40 years later, I now know the answer to those four questions and they are as applicable now as they were in 1967.

“No? I am not okay. No! I cannot cope. Yes! I need to phone someone before I go crazy and; No! I do not have everything that I need.”

Psychologists tell us, that the most traumatic moment of your life is being born. I disagree. I don't even remember it. The most traumatic moment of my life was leaving home, especially hearing the door slam behind me when I was barely through it.

Can you remember that first day at college when you knew no one and had no clue which door to go through? Can you remember being shunted from place to place, picking up lists, schedules, programs and piles of books you just knew you would never read? Can you remember seeking out a face that looked half human and maybe as lost as you, without the pink hair or a tee shirt that said, “I'm with stupid?”

That feeling of being lost, unattached, disconnected and unable to cope is a feeling that we work hard at irradiating from our experience for the rest of our life. We like to live with the

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familiar, the cozy, the old and traditional. I know guys in England who will only go to the one pub, all of their life.

Paul and Silas on Paul's third missionary journey have journeyed further than ever before and certainly outside their comfort zone. They find themselves in Macedonia, the land of Alexander and Greek culture. In a sense, they to are lost in a new place, and without the security of their friends. Yet, the Spirit of Christ is so powerful in them, and their faith is so strong, that things happen when they are around. Paul in particular, draws people to himself and to the Gospel like a magnet. It is an irresistible force such that he claims that he lives 'in Christ.'

Recently, I heard a writer and scholar of the New Testament say that the Early Christians, in the first 100 years of the church did not call themselves 'Christian,' or 'the Christian', they called themselves 'Christ.' Often Paul invokes his followers to 'put on Christ' or he says to them: 'you who are in Christ.'

It is a powerful image to attempt to be more than a follower of Christ, but rather to attempt to be another Christ. Christians become enormously effective when they add to this, Jesus' Gospel invitation to unite with his Spirit and with that of his Father. Hence the origin of doing everything, beginning everything, and ending everything, with the sign of the cross, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." From Baptism to the grave it unites and ties us to the God and Trinity that Jesus leaves to his disciples at his Ascension.

Yet, despite that prayer and its significance in our life when we look back at our week, we cannot help but notice that the following things hold true.

1. We tried to achieve everything ourselves.
2. We didn't rely on the Spirit and power of our God.
3. We didn't manage to achieve and complete half the tasks we set ourselves.
4. We end up blaming ourselves or claiming there are not enough days in the week or hours in the day.

If truth be told, we expect miracles on a daily basis, but on a daily basis we forget and fail to ask for them. That is why I began by saying: "I am not okay, I can't cope, I don't ask, and I do not have everything I need"

In these pre-Ascension Gospels, Jesus has been telling his disciples: "Listen, if you are not okay, ask for my help. I will be right here. If you think you can't cope, it is because you think you, as a mere human, have to accomplish everything yourself. Do you still not understand that your Father is the author of the Universe, the giver of the Water of Life? Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will open to you."

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The doors literally open for Paul and Silas precisely because they are people of the Spirit, people of faith. There are times when the miraculous almost becomes commonplace in their lives, so used are they to seeing the direct intervention of Christ in their mission and among the people they seek to evangelize.

Five years ago this week you and I also set out on our own a missionary journey. We were not going as far as Paul and Silas, but we did have some serious evangelism to do. I can remember telling you then that we of ourselves could achieve nothing, but with faith in the Holy Spirit our Christ could achieve everything.

It is enormously interesting to go back in our parish website and revisit the concerns that we had in 2003-2004. There in the sermon we said that if we fulfill the mission of proclaiming Jesus' teaching in this place every other concern that we had he would take care of. As we celebrate the feast of the Ascension today, I think we all have to acknowledge the power of Christ' presence in our midst and how he in the last five years has impacted all our lives. There is no area of this parish's life that has not benefited from the words of Christ: "I will be with you." As we pray our Eucharist of thanks today I can't help but remember Humphrey Bogart's words to Ingrid Bergman at the end of the movie *Casablanca*, he said: "You know the concerns and actions of you and me are not worth a hill of beans in this crazy world but.."

This might also apply to you and me. What you and I can do of itself is probably close to a hill of beans; but what all of us can achieve through the saving grace of our Christ and his Holy Spirit is enormous.

Perhaps, in return we can see in this Sunday morning service, the time we give back to God, as our most Holy hour. It is our time to put aside the cares of the week and allow God's love into our heart. It is at that moment that the Spirit permeates our soul and brings us healing from the week past and hope for the week to come.

We all need that; it is the fuel of our existence; it is the water of life, it is the grace that Christ freely gives to those who would say: "I believe in you."

Amen+

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