Sunday 8 May – Feast of the Ascension of the Lord

Scripture: Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 46; Ephesians 1:17-23; Luke 24:46-53

*Jesus led the disciples out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.*

For such a dramatic event, Luke uses fairly low-key language. In the psalm for today, we acclaim the God who goes up with shouts of joy – the Lord who goes up with trumpet blast. But Luke has Jesus simply withdrawing from the disciples – gradually moving away from them – or fading from their sight – or, perhaps ascending, without fanfare, to the skies. However it happened, what Luke stresses is that Jesus is blessing them throughout. His last act- even as he withdraws – is to bless those who will continue his work on earth.

* What do you think it was like for the disciples to see Jesus withdrawing from them after all that had happened?
* What is the significance of Jesus blessing them right up until the last second of his physical presence on earth?

Spend time pondering how the disciples might have felt and reacted to what happens in today’s gospel – the bitter-sweet moment of parting from someone they have come to honour and love deeply. Think about the importance of that blessing – and imagine Jesus giving it to you. Think about the aspect of your life that most needs the Lord’s blessing and open yourself – and the need – to it.

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Monday 9 May

Scripture: Acts 19:1-8; Psalm 67; John 16:29-33

*Jesus said, ‘In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!’*

It is sayings like this that cause many of us to wonder whether we actually want to be disciples! Most of us did not choose to be baptised and some of us did not have much choice in whether to be confirmed or not – sacraments which both seal us as disciple of Jesus Christ. And yet, here is Jesus saying that being his disciples leads people into all sorts of problems – which most of us would rather avoid if at all possible!

* Are there times when you wish that Jesus had not chosen you to be a disciple and friend?
* When has being a disciple of Jesus caused you problems – or difficult choices?

Give thought today to how you see being a disciple of Jesus. Is it something that comes easily or is it something you struggle with? What joys does it bring – and what hassles? Have a prayerful conversation with the Lord about why he chose you – and what only you can do on his behalf. Ask for the grace to trust his choice and to live fully as the person he knows you can be – with his blessing and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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Tuesday 10 May

Scripture: Acts 20: 17-27; Ps 67; John 17: 1-11

*Jesus said, ‘Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.’*

On first reading this, we might feel a bit uncomfortable with the idea of someone asking God to glorify them – did Jesus really only do his work on earth to earn glory in heaven? But John is being far cleverer than to suggest this. This passage comes just before his account of Jesus’ Passion and John is reminding us of words from the Prologue to his Gospel when he proclaimed that the Word of God was with God from the very beginning and that the Word left this glory to “pitch his tent” (as some translations have it) among human beings. Just before Jesus undergoes his Passion and Death, John reminds us just who this is going to happen to.

* How do you think the disciples felt as they heard Jesus praying to the Father like this?
* Would knowing that Jesus is the Word of God made Flesh have helped the disciples to react differently to his Passion and Death?

Spend some time today reflecting on this great mystery – that the Word of God became flesh so that humans could have eternal life. You may like to turn to a Christmas carol that expresses this admirably – pondering its words in the light of today’s Gospel:

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!

Hail the Son of Righteousness!

Light and life to all He brings;

Ris'n with healing in His wings

Mild He lays His glory by,

Born that man no more may die.

Born to raise the sons of earth,

Born to give them second birth

(Hark! The herald angels sing

"Glory to the newborn King!")

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Wednesday 11 May

Scripture: Acts 20:28-38; Psalm 67; John 17:11-19

*Jesus said, ‘Sanctify them (my disciples) in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.’*

For the Jewish people of Jesus’ day, sanctification was strongly associated with sacrifice. The blood of lambs and other animals was seen to sanctify – to cleanse – those who offered them. Jesus seems to be pulling two things together here – the sanctification which will come from the blood he will shed on the cross – and the sanctification in truth which comes from the word of God (and in its fullness and perfection in the Word of God, of course)

* How does Jesus linking the sanctification by his blood and by the word help you to understand more deeply what we do at Mass?
* What impact does the sacrifice Jesus was willing to make for you have on your daily life?

You might find it helpful to pray with a crucifix or icon of the crucifixion. Remember Jesus’ words about sanctification… this sacrifice is not a judgement on you but a willing gift to make you holy – not perfect, but a person who knows how much God loves them and tries to respond in kind. Do not fill the space with lots of words… allow the prayer to unfold as the Lord wills.

*KT*

Thursday 12 May (St Nereus and St Achilleus or St Pancras)

Scriptures: Acts 22:30; 23:6-11; Psalm 15; John 17:20-26

*Jesus said, ‘Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them’.*

This is an awesome idea – that the love that the Father has for the Son will be in us – and that the Word of God not only “pitches his tent” in the world but in us. How can this be? And what could we ever do to deserve so great a favour? The answer is that we can do nothing other than trust that we are loved by God and open our hearts and minds to the presence of the one who gave everything so that God might make his home in us.

* How does the idea of the God who lives in eternal glory making a home within you touch you?
* How might you become more open to this presence?

You might like to pray a simple mantra at various points during the day. Time it with your breathing – on the in-breath say (silently – but as if breathing in the life and love of God) *You are in me* – and on the out-breath (breathing yourself into God) *and I am in you*. When distractions come – as they will – increase the “volume” of your silent prayer to help you to refocus – then let it decrease as you re-enter the prayer more fully.

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Friday 13 May (Our Lady of Fatima)

Scripture: Acts 25:13-21; Psalm 102; John 21:15-19

*After Jesus had shown himself to the disciples and they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’*

Jesus has referred to himself as the Good Shepherd – the one who lays down his life for his sheep. Among the things that he is passing on is this mantle of shepherd. Interestingly, he does not choose the only disciple to remain faithful to the bitter end, the Beloved Disciple (probably John himself), but the one who denied knowing him, not once but three times. From now on, Peter will be the good shepherd – the one charged with caring for the flock Jesus is entrusting to him… and will, in turn hand this mantle on through the centuries until our own day with Pope Emeritus Benedict and Pope Francis.

* How do you think Peter felt as he realised that the mantle of the Good Shepherd was being placed on his shoulders?
* What are the characteristics of a “good shepherd” – and how do you see them in the popes who have served the Church over recent years?

Spend some time today praying for Pope Francis – who is the active “Shepherd of God’s People” –and Pope Emeritus Benedict who holds the Church in his prayer.

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Saturday 14 May – St Matthias

Scriptures: Acts 1: 15-17, 20-16; Ps 112; John 15: 9-17

*Jesus said, ‘You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last…’*

Jesus did not include Matthias in the original selection of the Twelve – instead, he is chosen by lot as a replacement for Judas. The First Reading tells us that Matthias had been with Jesus throughout his ministry – and it sounds as if there were quite a few others. He was not, though, party to many of the intimate conversations Jesus had with the Twelve. This puts him in a potentially awkward position but shows that the disciples knew that the work was to continue. They did not fully understand how but the election of Matthias brings the number of apostles back up to Twelve and it is as if the stage is set for the coming of the Holy Spirit which we will celebrate tomorrow.

* How do you think Matthias felt – before and after his selection as the replacement for Judas?
* When have you had to step into someone else’s shoes – particularly when your predecessor had made a mess of things.

Tomorrow is Pentecost Sunday when we recall the Coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and opens them up to a new dimension to their lives. You might like to reflect back over your Lent and Eastertime and think about what difference it has made to your life… it does not need to be a great change but, perhaps, a habit you are changing – or an insight you have gained from a Reading or liturgy. Give thanks to God for it – and then pray for an openness to the Holy Spirit for whatever God has in store for you in coming months or years.

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