

**SECOND READING:** Acts 1:1-11

1 In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning 2 until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. 4 While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." 6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 9 When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 11 They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

**Holy Wisdom, Holy Word...Thanks be to God**

**FIRST READING:** Psalm 47

Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with loud songs of joy. For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome, a great king over all the earth. He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet. He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves. God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is the king of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm. God is king over the nations; God sits on his holy throne. The princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God; he is highly exalted.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

### ***“Joyful Sadness”***

*On this Ascension Sunday and also this Mother’s Day, I am reminded of a time, actually two special times, when I had a glimpse of what the disciples must have experienced so long ago. The first time I’ll tell you about was when I was being wheeled out of the hospital with our first baby, Joel, in my arms. The sun was shining, the sky was blue, and the Texas air warm. I was so proud, excited, happy looking down at that little red-faced baby, anticipating the new life ahead of us all as “family”. But yet, **at the very same time**, I recall having a sadness that my time with Mike alone, our time, his and mine, as just a young couple with no one but each other, was over. Sometime during the previous evening, the relationship of just a twosome had simply slipped away. The second time I will mention was, in many ways, the reverse. It occurred 18 years later when Mike and I had just moved Joel into his freshman dorm at Austin College. While I resisted begging, I wanted badly for Mike to drive around the block so that I could get just one more glimpse of Joel. As I recall, we extended the parting as long as we could with a meal at Denny’s and many pictures in front of the fountain. But the time had come, and we said our good-byes. I was aching inside as it seemed to me that my boy was somehow simply slipping away. But yet, **at the very same time**, I was so proud that Joel was now entering a new chapter in his life, one for which he’d been preparing for so long. I wanted nothing more for him. (pause) In both of these situations, I was experiencing what has been called, “a joyful sadness” ...a great joy in the midst of, **at the very same time as**, significant sadness.<sup>1</sup>*

Now, the sadness I’m talking about needs no definition. We all know it...the inevitable loss, hurt, the pain of well, life. But the joy I’m talking about here is different from a bubbly giddiness, a transient hap hap happiness. It is an abiding sense of peace, a confidence that in the end, all will be well. This joy is a calmness of living above the world’s problems with a focus on that which is grander and eternal. It is what Paul calls the “*peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, the joy which will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus*”. (Phil 4:7).

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<sup>1</sup> Karoline Lewis. Sermon: “Joyful Sadness” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IO-rt1YMcW8>. (accessed 5-10-18).

Forty days after Easter, when Jesus, who had been often with them following his resurrection, returned to God, to the realm from which he came, the disciples certainly experienced this joyful sadness. They must have felt the gut-wrenching angst of losing the physical reality of their friend. They watched him stretch out his hands and bless them, and likely they remembered him having done the same when he'd taught them, eaten with them, served them. As he disappeared from their eyes, they certainly remembered when he blessed the poor, the children, the outcast, the sick, the dying, when he forgave sinners and sent them out to live godly lives, and when he prayed for enemies, stood against injustice, and challenged the hypocrites. They remembered him working passionately all his days to simply convince people that God loves them. No doubt they recalled that horrible Friday when he was tortured and killed but also the amazing Easter morning, when it became clear that he was alive, the Messiah, the Son of God. They remembered these things and then watched him simply slip away from them once again. Yet, **at the same time**, the disciples knew that they were part of something very big. They sensed that God's plan for the salvation of the world was playing out. In the final verses of Luke's gospel, we're told, in fact, that they and others returned to Jerusalem with great joy! They spent the next days, until Pentecost, together praying and singing, worshiping and waiting.

Dr. Karolyn Lewis reflects on Jesus' final prayer for the disciples (in Jn 17), in which he said that he'd given his disciples his joy and wanted it to be complete in them. "He used," Lewis notes, "a perfect passive verb". Now, you may not remember what a perfect passive verb is, but trust me, Dr. Lewis does. A perfect, passive verb is one that is used when the thing being spoken about has happened BUT will also continue to be. So then, what Jesus was saying was that he'd given his disciples (and by extension, us) his joy.... The abundant joy of the best wine when we least expect it, of acceptance in the midst of rejection, of nourishment when hunger threatens, of light when there is only darkness, of sight when there's only blindness, of a new community when we've lost ours, of life when there is certain death<sup>2</sup>... he's given us his joy

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<sup>2</sup> Karoline Lewis. *Sermon: "Joyful Sadness"*

and it will be always in our presence. It will always be in our presence. That's because Jesus lives. He will no longer be limited to Judea and the 1<sup>st</sup> c; he has ascended to be alive for all people in all places and all times. No wonder the disciples went on their way rejoicing even after tearfully seeing him leave. They understood that in Spirit Jesus would be with them, no matter what trials, losses, sadnesses they were to face.

The story of the Ascension means many things to the Church. This is because it clarifies Jesus' status (*He is Lord, ruling with God forever*). The Ascension also clarifies the relationship of Jesus with God (*He came from God in the beginning, and plays a role in the sending of the Spirit*).<sup>3</sup> But maybe, maybe the most important thing the Ascension means to the Church is what we've been here talking about...that we can now have joy in sadness, a perspective that breaks into every abandonment, every pain and fear, that breaks into our time when evil is doomed but still so real, that breaks from the future into our present. The Ascension means that we can live, accompanied by the Spirit, IN but not OF the world, with a grander, more eternal view. (*pause*).

*It is a tradition in my family for the grandmother to give a little spoon to the new mother when a baby is born. The mother will use it in feeding the child and give it to them when they are grown. So, my mother had the spoon that my grandmother fed her with. I have the spoon my mother used to feed me, and my boys will soon have the spoons with which they were fed. I thought of this tradition this week as I have been thinking a lot about my mother. I thought of how when I was last with her, just before she passed away, I fed her. She did not have the strength to hold a spoon. I remember having a lump in my throat while I did it, but also being, at the very same time, so honored. It was my turn now to feed the one who'd fed me. The skills of filling up the spoon with pudding, mashed potatoes or oatmeal and emptying it carefully into her mouth came back quickly. And I thought this week that surely that's because I had fed many-a-mouth before. In fact, I'd done that a lot with the little spoons she'd given me! As I look back at it all now, Jesus was there in my mother's room, steadying my fears of her*

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<sup>3</sup> Rolf Jacobson. [https://www.workingpreacher.org/brainwave.aspx?podcast\\_id=1017](https://www.workingpreacher.org/brainwave.aspx?podcast_id=1017) (accessed 5/12/18).

*impending death, reminding me of the hope that is mine, my mother's, all of ours, and he was guiding my hand in the work which was now mine to do. (pause)*

The work which was now mine to do....Ah, brothers and sisters, did you catch that part in the Scripture passage today that part about the men in white robes saying to the disciples as they longingly, tearfully watched Jesus leave them? "*Men of Galilee,*" they said, "*why do you stand looking up toward heaven?*" Well, that is Bible-talk for "*Don't just stand there, do something. Get going. Now it's your turn*"<sup>4</sup> Right!

Friends, we have been given so many blessings by the Lord of Heaven and Earth. He has shown us how to live (forgiving, challenging, feeding, embracing, speaking, defending, healing), and he has touched our hearts with faith and hope. He has put us in families and given us friends who mean so very much. These blessings are his joy and it is always present with us, just as he is always present, even...especially...when the ground seems to be falling away under us, when sadness, rejection, grief, betrayal, guilt, fear and loneliness seem to be overtaking us. So many eternal blessings, we have. And it is important that we stop and express our gratitude for them. But before he ascended, Jesus also made it clear that there is more we need do. We are not to stand there looking up at heaven. We are to serve, to pick up a spoon and take our turn in feeding others. We are to allow his joy to become complete in us... by doing for others as he has done for us. We need become Jesus's *witnesses*. *We need become his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" May it be so. May it be so. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Father Michael Renninger. Sermon, "*It's Your Turn Now.*" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XviniLKIG4E> (accessed 5-11-18).