

“May we come to share in Christ’s divinity as he has humbled himself to share in our humanity” these words are said at every Mass by the minister preparing the chalice. This is a reminder that this is a gift, this opportunity for salvation. The sacrifice made by Jesus was not for his good but for ours, as we reflect on the happenings of the 40th day after the resurrection, how can we make ourselves worthy of this gracious revelation.

This is one of those scenes that I find fascinating, can you imagine being there and seeing Christ ascend into heaven? Most of us have seen an event that is so out of the ordinary that it takes a minute for your mind to register what your eyes are seeing, then your mind goes into overdrive trying to understand just what it is you have just witnessed. All the while the events seem to happen in slow motion, as if our mind cannot understand what is happening. To make matters more perplexing, Jesus had just informed them that there was another, the Holy Spirit, which will come after him and help them spread the good news. He did tell them that they would not know the time or the season, but in that moment how long did they wait? If I had been there and seen someone drifting off into the sky I suspect, I would have hung out there for a while. We must remember what a big deal going into the sky was 2000 years ago. The only thing in the sky back then were birds, so the sky was a vast unknown. He told them someone or something was coming, he told them they would not be alone.

The spirit that will be sent is the enabling force to fulfill the charge set forth in the gospel today. Unlike many of the teachings of Christ, this is not a parable, and does not need translation, “go therefore and make disciples of all nations”. Pretty clear, he spoke plainly here, he even told them how to do it. The same words for baptism that we use today.

Following Jesus, then, requires both obeying his teachings and imitating his example. But this is not the sum of the matter. For obeying and imitating are not ends in themselves but are means to a greater end. That end or goal of discipleship is to become like Jesus himself: to think as he thought, to feel as he felt, to act as he acted, desire what he wanted. As John puts it, “Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 John 2:6). Because Jesus is the image of God in human form (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1: 3), as we become increasingly like him, the image of God is increasingly restored in our lives.

A key part of this process is gaining a clearer knowledge of Jesus as he is presented to us in Scripture. And a time-honored way of doing this is to consistently and prayerfully read the Gospels and reflect on the life and teaching of Jesus. As we immerse our minds and hearts in the gospels, two major defining characteristics of his life stand out with striking clarity: faith and love. Secure in the love of God and his own sonship, Jesus lived with an unshakable trust in his heavenly Father and wholehearted love for God and others. If we want to become like Jesus, faith and love must become defining characteristics of our lives, too.

Jesus not only lived a life of faith before his disciples, but he also called them to live a life of faith as well. First and foremost, he called them to put their trust in him as Messiah and Son of God. But he didn't stop there. He called them to an active, living faith in their heavenly Father in the affairs of everyday life. Whether for daily bread or power to heal the sick and cast out demons or to overcome the perils of nature, they were to live by faith and to grow in faith.

When we look carefully at the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, the call to "follow me" takes on much greater clarity. It is indeed a call to "walk as Jesus walked," to live a life of radical faith and love. Once we truly grasp this, our first reaction is likely to be one of concern. If we are at all aware of the sin and the dysfunctions that plague our lives, we know it is impossible for us to fulfill such a call. Yet this reaction is actually healthy, because it is based on reality. It is indeed impossible for us to live this way. And that is precisely the point. Jesus knows we cannot follow him without a power beyond ourselves. And that is why he sent the Holy Spirit to empower us.

In the second reading we see Christ seated firmly at the right hand of the father, in a place above all things, specifically the church, "which is his body". If we think of the church as the body of Christ, how do we fit in? We are the arms and the legs, the parts that move and do work. In order to fulfill the directive given in the gospel to evangelize to the ends of the earth, we must be the hands and feet of the church. The apostles had been given three years of instruction, now it was time to put all the knowledge to use. Were they instantly transformed into magnificent public speakers, no. But the spirit will guide them in their mission to spread the word of the Lord to all.

Christ came for us, he did not need saving, we did. He left us with the tools that we need to build an eternal life with him in heaven. Christ's physical connection with humanity spans from the incarnation to the ascension. Jesus rose up to the heavens

as witnessed by the 11 apostles. This is our connection to heaven, Jesus walked with us on earth so we can walk with him in heaven, the truly divine Christ became truly human for us. If we choose to follow his examples, we too may have the opportunity to participate in the heavenly banquet.