Easter 7A 2020 Anything but sad, the Lord`s Ascension

blazed the path to eternal life at the Father`s right hand.

Social Distancing has reminded us of the importance of touch. Waving at your grandchildren is not the same as hugging them. God has made us social creatures. One part of that is the innate need to be close to our loved ones.

When Jesus was lifted up to heaven, He ascended to the right hand of His Father. In Psalm 110:1 David describes the Lord`s location. ``The Lord (God the Father) says to my Lord (God the Son): Sit at **my right hand**, until I make your enemies your footstool.``

The right hand of the Father sounds like a long way away. God is in His holy heaven way up there. Lowly mortals way down here have no clue of the distance to the place where Jesus is.

The 11 disciples watched as Jesus was lifted up in His Resurrected Body until a cloud took him out of their sight. Since He went to the Father’s right hand, and they were left staring at nothing, how great might their separation anxiety have been? They were accustomed to seeing him in his body, embracing him, eating and travelling with him.

Is it any different when a spouse dies or a child is taken away or you move a long way from home? Video chatting is not possible since there are no computers in heaven.

Now lets go back and look at the facts. When we bury a loved one, their bodies are sowed into the ground as St. Paul describes it in 1 Cor. 15. The body is like a seed that is put into the ground awaiting the Day of Resurrection.

Jesus was already risen in his body. He had already defeated the power of death by taking up life again. He ascended in his body. This is different than Enoch and Elijah being taken up into heaven because Jesus goes to His father’s right hand. There is room for only one there.

The right hand of God is best understood as a position not a place. It is a position of highest honour. The Father has given it to His Son only. Where does that leave Enoch, Elijah, Abraham and all his children? They are alive in God who is God of the living but God has only one right hand man. That is Jesus.

The epistle reading for Ascension Day best describes God’s right hand. From Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (1: 20bf) “[God] raised [Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”

Jesus was given a heavenly place above all governments, demons and all angels at the moment of his ascension. This place of honour lasts not only as long as this world but also for the age to come.

But wouldn’t Jesus already have that position at His Father’s right hand because Jesus is God as the Father is God? The Son of God always had the same glory as the Father. But now the Father gives the glory of sitting as his right hand to Jesus who became man. Jesus said to His Father (John 17:5): “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.”

According to Christ’s divinity He is equal to the Father. According to his humanity, inferior. But the Father gave all authority in heaven and earth to Jesus after the cross, after the tomb was empty, and at the occasion of the Ascension.

For us lowly sinful mortals, this is not sad but a time to rejoice. Jesus died and rose again for the life of the world and now as our brother, ascends to the Father in his body. That is where our bodies will go on the Day of Resurrection. Jesus is the First. He blazes the path to the Father’s right hand and shows us where all who follow Him will go.

That is anything but sad. We can now build our lives based on our Lord’s Ascension who has cleansed us and taken away the barrier between heaven and earth.

Being at his Father’s right hand in the highest place of honour does not mean that He is absent from his church. Quite the opposite. It is good that we no longer see him, so that Jesus can be with his church all over the world. There are no more barriers that can separate us from God. Where Jesus is there is His church on earth and in heaven. He comes where two or three are gathered publically in His Name. May that happen again real soon after the restrictions are lifted. Jesus comes to dwell within us by his risen and ascended body and blood in Holy Communion. May that be first and foremost on our minds and hearts as we celebrate it together.

So now if Jesus has been given the highest place of honour, why does His church suffer so much on earth? Why do the forces of evil, both demonic and human, take advantage of the church if her Leader sits at the right hand?

St. Peter give us the clear answer: (1:12 – 16)  Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.  Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

Christians are called to suffer not because Jesus is weak, inattentive or unconcerned. Jesus became man and obeyed His father and rescued us from all evil. The Father will place death, the devil and all his demons, including every human adversary under his feet on Judgment Day. Until then, Jesus loves and prays for his church and is with her during persecution. If He suffered tremendously in this life, why should we expect anything else?

Jesus the Ascended Lord of the church will share his glory with the church for all to see on the Last Day. We are close to him even though we do not see him. Christ is not far from us at all after Ascending.

As we suffer, rather than thinking Jesus is distant, we share Christ`s sufferings, certainty of hope. Humble yourselves, so that at the proper time, he may exalt you. Jesus ascended to rule all things for the church even though we suffer because we share in His sufferings, and will be exalted at the proper time.

Collect for Easter 7: O King of glory, Lord of hosts, uplifted in triumph far above all heavens, leave us not without consolation, but send us the Spirit of truth whom You promised from the Father: for you live and reign with Him and the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1: 1 – 11 The Ascension

1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you 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, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed 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 and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” 9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Gospel for Easter 7 John 17: 1 - 11

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

6 “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. 8 For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9 I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. 11 And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.