

Pastoral Message: May 29, 2022

We celebrate the Feast of Ascension. Perhaps we would like to move directly from Easter to Pentecost, but, if you think about it, our journey is really not like that; we have intermediate stages. I would suggest our scriptures point to this today. In today's readings, we get the ending of the Gospel of Luke and the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. Ascension points out that one book is ending, but, also, a whole new book is just beginning. I once was struck by a line in a novel when the character said that they were so busy reading the last chapter that they could not see the next chapter ahead of them in the story. Perhaps this describes the experience of the first followers of Jesus. At the Ascension one chapter had ended, but, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, a new chapter had begun. I wonder with all that we have been through in the last couple years if Ascension might be a good way to describe where we are as a church. The tragedy of the abuse crisis in our Roman Catholic Church points out the need for dismantling of corrupt structures. We often wonder what will become of the synod, and I know that there can be cynicism that not much will change. Perhaps though older structures that no longer bring forth life are slowly being dismantled, and the Holy Spirit is in the process of starting a new chapter or building new structures and ways of being church. I think, with the shortage of clergy and religious and many other challenges the church faces, we need to be open to how the Holy Spirit may be calling us to live out our identity as church in new ways. I think the important thing to remember is that we are the church. We have each other, and we are called to support and take care of each other. I often think of the synod gatherings and how on Sunday afternoon sometimes I would see the parking lot full knowing small groups were supporting each other, reflecting on where our church needs to go in the future—the people of God setting a vision for the future

There is sometimes a temptation by some groups in our church to make a separation between the church and the culture, but the Holy spirit came to do more than renew the church and, as Vatican II said, renew the face of the earth. We need to be a church that is prophetic, and our bishop has spoken out against the Buffalo massacre and racism and violent hateful ideologies that have led to this terrible, senseless tragedy. May we stand in solidarity with our black brothers and sisters and not keep this tragedy at arms-length but instead see this as real names in stories that could happen in our own community. We must reflect on what structures in our culture and church are promoting this type of hatred that needs to be dismantled. Also, how many senseless acts of gun violence will we go through before we will change our laws to put restrictions on guns so innocent people won't be killed? May the Holy Spirit guide us in so many ways to write a better story and future for our human family so we may truly renew the face of the earth

Disclaimer: I wrote this on Tuesday--before I found out about the terrible tragedy of the shooting in the school in Texas. These must be more than numbers and statistics among us. These tragedies in Buffalo or Texas, we need to see these as brothers and sisters or our children that could be members of our own parish! We risk the danger of not seeing that this type of thing could happen in our own community. These parents in Texas on Wednesday had the worst nightmare of their lives that they will never get over. On Ascension Sunday let's take the scripture seriously where the apostles were told not to just stare at the sky. This means our prayers are good but also not enough. As theologian Miroslav Volf put it, "There is something deeply hypocritical about praying for a problem you are unwilling to resolve." Let us address the dangerous, hateful ideologies that lead to these tragedies and enact laws with restrictions on guns. Let us believe that the Holy Spirit that we pray to wants us to enact change.