

HOMILY

The Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord May 4, 2008

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A small boy had been told that he must always wait patiently 'till he was served at meals and not draw attention to himself. One day he was eating at his friend's house with his mother and, somehow, he was accidentally overlooked. Nobody noticed, and for a time he was patient; but at last he couldn't stand it any longer. Leaning over to his mother, he said in an audible whisper, "Mother, do little boys who starve to death go to heaven?"

The little fellow was more patient than most of us. I read recently that only nine per cent of adults are willing to wait more than five minutes for a waiter to ask for their beverage order; twenty percent can bear only one minute. We don't like to wait.

Over a period of forty days after his resurrection, Luke tells us that Jesus appeared to many of the believers. During this time he was teaching them about the Kingdom of God. On one occasion he said to them,

"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Why did they have to wait for God to give them the Holy Spirit? Why couldn't they go out and start ministering right away? We can empathize with those disciples, can't we? None of us likes to wait. We don't like to wait to see what the results will be. We don't like to wait for things to be set right. We don't like to wait for God to answer our prayers. We want to get on with our own agenda.

Yet, waiting is part of life. Remember how hard it was to wait when you were young—waiting for Christmas, waiting for a driver’s license, waiting for graduation? Today we still have to wait—waiting for a project to be finished, waiting at the bedside of a loved one, waiting for a promotion or for retirement. Jesus told his disciples to wait. They were not ready to receive the Father’s gift. There was some spiritual maturation that needed to take place. They needed more time.

Have you noticed that some things take time? We wonder why does God not work more quickly in our lives. We wonder why our prayers are not answered according to our timetable. We wonder why we do not see results as rapidly as we would like. One of the great lessons we must learn in life is that God’s schedule is not our schedule.

Take today’s feast of the Ascension. We are celebrating an event in which we are left behind. Ascension is the day the *present* Lord became *absent*. What reason would we have to celebrate that?

The truth is that in any relationship, if the relationship is strong and true, then the spirit of the absent one stays with us. It gives us comfort. When we are away from someone we love, we can remember them, even understand them in new and special ways. We reflect on the one we love and this gives us a new and stronger picture of that person. Delays do not mean God is not with us. They do not mean our needs are being ignored. God is aware of our needs. God does care.

A mother was trying to put her three-year-old son to bed for a nap. When that was unsuccessful, she put him in her bed and laid down with him to encourage him to rest. She fell asleep, but he did not. When she stirred and saw him sitting on a chair at the end of the bed, she asked, “Luke, what are you doing?”

“I’m playing God,” he replied.

“Playing God?” she questioned with a puzzled tone.

“Yes, I’m watching over you when you sleep.”

Ah, the wisdom and the faith of a child. Just because God does not operate according to our time schedule does not mean that God is insensitive to our needs. It means that God is watching over us until the time is right.

A Jewish rabbi, who grew up in New York City, was blind from birth. Someone asked him how he was able to get through all the studies and the intense process of becoming a rabbi. He said that it was largely due to his mother. When he was six years old, he went for a walk in Central Park with his sister. She was holding his hand, but then they got separated. He panicked and went first in one direction and then in another calling her name. He was lost. He crossed Fifth Avenue, stopping traffic. Confused and terrified, he suddenly touched an iron fence which felt familiar. He began to grope his way along the familiar iron and stone buildings. Finally, he came to his family's apartment, opened the door and walked in. His mother came in behind him, spoke his name and gave him a hug. She had spotted him three blocks away. It must have hurt his mother's heart to see her child in distress. But instead of following her impulse to rescue him, she patiently waited while he found his own way home.

How God must agonize as we stumble our way through life. But God knows our needs. God knows our spiritual resources. God knows circumstances we are not even aware exist. Faith is not memorizing the particulars of our religion. Faith is learning to trust God, whether in a time of waiting or a time of venturing forth to do great things for God.

Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came upon them. You and I need to learn to wait on God and to learn to trust that God's silence is not God's absence.