

## SOLEMNITY OF THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD “B”

MAY 12/13, 2018

A priest friend of mine shared a picture he had taken inside a church in Germany with me. It was one of the strangest pictures of a piece of religious devotional art I’d ever seen.

The plaster sculpture is a pair of flesh-colored feet surrounded by a small billowy blue-tinted cloud. The intention of the artist was to depict the scene of Jesus’ Ascension into heaven... But why just the feet? What message was the artist trying to convey?

I looked again at the photo of the feet, but also a couple of other pictures of the interior of the church my friend had taken. My friend took the picture standing in front of the altar gazing up at the ceiling. That the sculpture is situated there is significant. While the resurrected physically glorified body of Jesus disappears from physical sight the placement of the sculpture above the altar teaches us about the relationship of Jesus in glory to us of how and where we find and encounter him today. It is here, in the celebration of the Eucharist gathered around the altar, that we experience the preeminent reality of the ongoing presence of Jesus with and among us--His word in the Scriptures, his true risen body and blood present sacramentally in the bread and wine of the Holy Eucharist, and in each of us through faith.

Recently I read of another unusual artistic portrayal of Jesus Ascension. It is a woodcut showing the disciples looking heavenward with Jesus’ two feet and the cloud visible at the top, like the sculpture, but it contains an unusual detail. At its base Jesus’ footprints are depicted. Again, why would the artist have chosen to add such a detail?

St. Paul tells us today: (God) “has put all things beneath his (Jesus’) feet and gave him as head over all things to the church which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way” (Eph. 1:22, 23). Including the detail of Jesus’ footprint on the ground along with depicting his feet disappearing into the sky, the artist is teaching us that the group of disciples gathered on the holy mountain, and us, have been entrusted with following in, and continuing, the footprint of Jesus in the world.

The author of daily reflection I read a couple of weeks ago centered his thoughts on the word “Go” from today’s Gospel. He pointed out that it’s the first word Jesus speaks at the beginning of today’s gospel from the end of St. Mark’s account of the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus exhorts the disciples, and us, to “go”—not only walk in his footprints, but through the Holy Spirit given to us through our baptism and confirmation and renewed in us in each celebration of the Holy Eucharist we share in, continues to leave his footprints in the world today through the sacrament of our feet!

Jesus’ command to “go” tells the world that to be one of his followers means never standing still. It is to be a person of action, on a journey. We are not to keep the Gospel to ourselves (staring up to the heavens, or the ceiling!), but to go—to take it beyond our comfort zone, to every corner of the world. Jesus’ directive reminds us that Christianity is not static. It is not just words on a page, or a coin in a basket, or an hour on a Saturday evening or Sunday morning in church. No Christianity is dynamic. It moves. It flows from the altar out into the world. And it is still moving wherever each of us individually or collectively go. After 2000 years, it can’t be stopped.

Today’s gospel contains some pretty strange phenomena Jesus states will accompany those who believe in him. While some Christian sects have attempted to literally do them, what is meant is that because of the Holy Spirit given us, our mission in the name of Jesus will not fail even in the face of evil. Our acts of mercy: tending to the physical needs of others; working for justice for the voiceless; building peace between individuals and groups; seeking out the lost and abandoned are the healing acts of Jesus producing the same effects—the feet of Jesus used by God in his own work of putting all things under the feet of Jesus until that day when God will bring the work of creation to its completion.

Take that first step. Don’t look at the sky or the ceiling. Look for a need, a hunger, a heart aching for hope. And go carried by the sacrament of your feet.

Fr Jim Secora