

**6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter / Ascension Day (Year C): Promise of the Holy Spirit.**  
**1<sup>st</sup> reading for Ascension: Acts 1:1-11: The Risen Christ: final appearance;**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Reading for Ascension: Ephesians 1:17-23: gifts of faith & hope;**  
**Gospel for the Sunday: John 14:23-29: promised Advocate brings peace;**  
**Gospel for Ascension: Luke 24:46-53: Jesus shows: all has been fulfilled.**

If these notes are more garbled than usual, please excuse: (1) I've tried to combine this coming Sunday's themes with those of Ascension Day next Thursday; (2) I had full-left-knee replacement surgery last weekend, and so I am still recovering. If you read the Ascension story in Acts 1 (please do!) what comes across is that this is basically the last of Jesus' resurrection appearances, in which the apostles are made to understand that they would never see him physically again, but that he would somehow re-appear at a future time in history. The other important reading (from our faith's viewpoint) is this Sunday's gospel. In it, Jesus says: "I have said these things to you, while still with you; but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all I have said to you. My own peace I give to you; a peace the world cannot give – this is my gift to you."

This quotation from this Sunday's gospel helps to answer two important questions that have often been put to me. The first was common among school students in my teaching days: why couldn't Jesus have 'stayed' (in some way or another) with us permanently, just as he seems to have 'stayed' with the apostles in the weeks after the resurrection? Well, the answer is that he didn't. After his resurrection, he achieved the full glory of his life with the Father - immediately. Those appearances (the last of which was Ascension Thursday) were to convince the apostles – and us – that he was truly alive; he was already in full glory by then, not 'staying' somewhere in the Holy Land in between the appearances. Had he continued those appearances into human history, religion as we know it would have been impossible, because there would have been no need for faith, no free will about accepting Jesus or not. Instead, our religion was to be a matter of faith and choice, helped by the Holy Spirit – the "Advocate" promised by Jesus – who would teach us and remind us of what we needed to know. Each time you or I pray, do something spiritual, respond in faith, etc, is the result of the influence of that "Advocate" or Holy Spirit. In a bigger way, this applies to the life of the Church down the centuries: our whole community (despite its many problems) is the Holy Spirit's work.

The second question covered by this Sunday's gospel is the nature of the 'peace' Christ left us as his parting gift. (This next material is very much my own, and I respect the fact that many may disagree with me.) "Peace" can mean different things. One meaning is the absence of war or violence. Jesus (especially in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapters 5-7) advocated non-violence, a sort of pacifism, so that our first reaction to provocation was one of peace, not war or hatred. Therefore, all Christians must work to build a peaceful world. The problem comes in how we react to evil: once threats arise, should we do nothing? Should we allow the innocent to be over-run by the violent, either in society or between nations? How should we react to the Hitlers & Putins?

A second sort of 'peace' is freedom from worry. There are many people who appear (in the old phrase) "cool as cucumbers", and it is true that this sort of 'peaceful' lifestyle is attractive. However, there can be a fine line between being able to avoid stress, and the ducking of responsibilities. Therefore, while being free from worry is usually good, it can also show that responsibilities are not being faced. Pressure and stress can also lead to personal growth.

A third sort of "peace" is a contented conscience, and I think that this is Jesus' meaning here. One of the seven 'gifts' of the Holy Spirit is Wisdom, and I hope we can be 'wise' about ourselves. In practice, I suggest, it means an honest appreciation of our own good and bad points; a willingness to accept responsibility when we must; a trust in God's love, despite our own weaknesses; and a willingness to pray – at home, in private, in church, wherever. This contentment doesn't mean a lax, 'soft' conscience; it does mean being prepared to do our best, then trust in God. I think that this is the sort of peace "the world cannot give", because it is based on faith, not materialism or the media.

If you read the Ascension Day gospel for Year C, you get a sense of finality – Jesus' physical work and presence in the world have achieved his purpose. The apostles have been the witnesses to what he'd done; from now on, they would carry on his task, in the Church, with the help of "the power from on high" – the Holy Spirit. Of course, Jesus is still with us – but spiritually, in the Church. What we call "Ascension Day" marked the hand-over from one sort of presence to the other; this change, like all changes, has its difficulties, but it was necessary.

*Fr Jim Dunne.*