

Sermon for the Feast of the Ascension
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Holy Nativity, Plano
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We enter a “between” time today. After his resurrection, Jesus remained with his disciples for forty days. But we celebrate the great *fifty* days of Easter. Easter does not end until after we get through the Feast of Pentecost in a week and a half. Tonight, we remember and relive the event of the Ascension of our Lord, the end of the forty days of his physical presence after the resurrection.

The disciples of Jesus are understandably perturbed by this course of events. They have just gotten their Lord back from the dead, and now he is going to leave them. And he hasn’t taken on the oppressive authorities yet. There are a lot of loose ends for this poor traumatized band to deal with if Jesus is going to the Father. And so they ask him that all important question (at least, all important from their own perspective): “Lord will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” In other words, “Aren’t you going to deal with our problems before you go away again? Don’t leave us holding the bag again, Jesus.”

But that’s all because they don’t understand what he’s told them. He told them “to wait for the promise of the Father,” that “before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” But they are still afraid, so Jesus makes it clearer. “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses ... to the end of the earth.”

You see, when the Holy Spirit comes, he brings us into union with the Father and with Jesus. We live with the very life of Jesus in us. And so we have the power of Jesus to do the work of Jesus. The power with which we are clothed isn’t our own, it is his. So Jesus doesn’t leave us alone to do the work he has called us to do. He does it, through us, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the work is to be witnesses. I’ve told you before what that means. The Greek word is martyr, someone who gives testimony to the truth of Jesus Christ, whatever the cost. That means that the power he gives us isn’t just a blank check. It’s not going to get us whatever we want. But it will get us whatever he wants. Which will be better for us than we deserve or desire.

For the next ten days, we live between these two things. Jesus has returned to the Father, there to receive all dominion and authority. And he has promised us the Holy Spirit to empower us to do all his will. Until Pentecost, think with anticipation about the power unleashed within the Church that is willing to witness to Jesus. And ask God what it is that he is asking of us. Because that is what the power is for.

