

June 2, 2019

Acts 7:55-60; Rev 22:12-14, 16-17, 20 ; Jn 17:20-26

This past Thursday we celebrated the Solemnity of the Ascension. When Jesus ascended to heaven, he did not leave us alone. Jesus' continuing presence in his touch through the hands of others in his body, his power present in sacraments, and his physical presence in the Eucharist all remain with us. Today, Jesus speaks to us about unity. The unity Jesus speaks of makes us his presence in the world now, and leads us to share his presence after our death.

I heard on the radio just the other day that studies show that we are more divided as a society than at any time in the last 50 years. If you are in one group you are more likely to look down on people of the other group, to live in a certain place where more people of your group live, to drive certain types of cars, to vote for specific persons, and agree with opinions that are held by that group. What is more disturbing - in recent years people are more willing to dehumanize members of opposing groups by agreeing that people in other groups are subhuman or not worthy to live. This type of thinking has no place in the Christian heart and mind, it is scandalous when Christians think of each other in this way - and it is not what Jesus has taught us.

Jesus prays to the Father in the Gospel asking *that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us*. When he is saying that he prays we are one as he and the Father are one - that's a pretty tight union - and also that we as a unified whole may be united of God (that they may be "in us"). How could we humans, who tend to split ourselves into groups and find reasons to despise one another have that kind of unity? St. Paul says this division is crazy: *As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons.*¹ Paul teaches that we can't look down on any part of the body, because all are really part of the same body. It's nutty for a finger to say, I don't want to be with you other fingers, I want to be a toe - just so Paul says it is ridiculous to war with each other when through Baptism we have been joined to the one Body of Christ.

Jesus prays: *I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one*. He wants us to be one in his Body, so that we can share in the unity of he and the Father. He

¹ 1 Cor 12:12

ultimately wishes this for two reasons: First, so that we as a Body on this earth can function to minister to the world being his hands and feet, and being the salt of the earth and a light to the world - as he says - so that we can be a force that heals divisions and draws all people to God. We can't do this effectively when we are divided with one hand is over there, and the spleen over there, and the liver and the gal bladder are not on speaking terms ... dysfunctional bodies are not healthy and don't live. He wants us to be his alive and healthy presence in the world - which means we have to rise above all the divisions, and political separations, and the hating of the other group that is going on more and more in our world. The second reason Jesus wants us to be one in his Body he said today: *I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me.* He wants us to be inside that Body so that we may be where he has ascended and that we can, as part of Jesus, share in the glory of heaven.

We heard today St. Stephen give witness to that glory when he has a vision: *Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.* He is so joined to that Body that he gets a glimpse into God's timeless reality and sees Jesus in glory in heaven. He is so joined to that Body that he is actually got one foot there himself, he is so joined to that Body that he acts exactly as Jesus did when he was being executed and says: *Lord, do not hold this sin against them,* and he prays - as his earthly Body dies - that his spirit be joined into Jesus' resurrected body in heaven as he says: *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*

Jesus calls us to a radical unity that is difficult for humans to achieve, and even more difficult if we hold to the values of this world. Jesus talks about how we must be in this earth so that his presence will be seen and felt by others, and so that we can draw more people to be joined to his body and experience the resurrection and ascension after earthy death. Jesus calls to us today to work to achieve greater unity within our families, in our workplaces, in our social groups, in our parish community, and in the world as a whole. He calls to us to come to where he is as we heard in our second reading: *The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." Let the hearer say, "Come." Let the one who thirsts come forward, and the one who wants it receive the gift of life-giving water.* Let all who have received the life-giving waters of Baptism approach that one Body in the Eucharist, joining in love to all others so that call between heaven and earth in this passage brings us to union with God and one another. Each time we let go of divisions and like Stephen look beyond this world to the perfect unity in heaven we may do as he did and forgive his persecutors and long to join them in peace into the one Body of Jesus now ascended to heaven.