

My younger brother, John, was a great fan of Basketball Coach John Wooden. I think he secretly fantasized about being named after the coach, but he was actually named after our 35th President, John Kennedy, who was assassinated a mere 5 months after my brother was born.

I also think he shared a connection in that my brother graduated from Purdue University in Indiana, where Wooden got his start in basketball before moving on to become the “Wizard of Westwood” in his immortal years at UCLA.

Back in 2003, in his book, *One-on-One*, Coach Wooden wrote:

“I loved working with my team and I loved practices. Since retiring, I don’t miss the games. But I do miss the preparation for the games. I liked to think that we were so well prepared that once a game started, I could go up in the stands – and the team would carry on – not missing me at all.”

On this feast of the Ascension – we celebrate the fact that there was a time, 40 days after his Resurrection, when Jesus no longer walked on the face of the earth – physically – any longer. “When he had said these things to them – as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight.”

I am sure Jesus thought that by this time – he had prepared his team – his disciples – so well – that much like Coach Wooden -- Jesus could now just sit up in the stands --- and the disciples would carry on without him.

Oh they would miss him – they could never stop talking about him – and then those stories about him eventually got written down and passed on from one generation to the next down to our own. And now we are the team that has to carry on – without having our leader physically with us any longer.

Thankfully, we have Jesus’ play book – which we have been reading from throughout the Easter season.

.. let’s review all those things we were told if we want to be successful witnesses of the Risen Lord:

--We have to become merciful – just as our heavenly Father is merciful.

--We have to nurture our sense of awe and amazement.

-- We have to train our ears and our hearts to continue listening to the quiet voice of the Good Shepherd calling us to following after him – often to places where we don’t want to go, since they are out of our comfort zone.

--We have to take the time and effort to stay connected to Jesus, our Vine – because apart from him we can do nothing. But with him, we can produce much fruit.

--And we have to love one another – as Jesus has loved us.

The consistent practice and eventual perfection of these things – will allow us to be the effective witnesses of the Risen One we are called to be – allowing us to go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.

Of course, as with so many other things – this is easier said than done. How will we ever have the courage to carry on our important ministry? How can we ever expect to stay on task and not get side-tracked? How are we going to continue living in a manner worthy of the call we have received – especially with humility, gentleness, and patience????

I think that’s why – in her wisdom – the Church gives us the feasts we celebrate over the next three weekends.

First – Pentecost—for we need the gift of the Holy Spirit to pull this off successfully. We need that ongoing presence of Christ with us which we receive in the Holy Spirit. So over the next week, let’s pray: Come, Holy Spirit!

Second – we need to get caught up in the life of the Holy Trinity. To be reminded that we are created in the image and likeness of God – and at the core of God’s being – is a relationship: of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit --- and we are a part of the love created in the midst of that relationship.

Third – we need to be constantly strengthened and renewed by the gift of the Eucharist – the very Body and Blood of Christ – that little by little, over a lifetime – will transform us more and more into the image of Christ – for we become what we eat.

[Which brings me to the time I want to spend with the young Church who will receive Jesus for the First Time today. . .]

With the help of these reminders over the next three weeks – and by the grace of God – we can be the effect witnesses we are called to be.

And for once I am going to tell you NOT to be like the disciples – who after watching Jesus ascend to heaven – just stood there idle –

who needed to be reminded by two men dressed in white “Men of Galilee – why are you standing there looking up at the sky??”

Let’s eagerly get out there – into the world – and get to work: witnessing to the Risen Christ by our words and actions!