

Today's Gospel and the Reading from the Acts of the Apostles -- give us two versions of the faith event we are celebrating today: the Ascension of the Lord.

There is, and should be, similarities between these two versions -- for remember they are both written by the same person: Saint Luke.

The Gospel is the "first book" mentioned to Theophilus at the beginning of today's reading from Acts, the one that "dealt with all that Jesus did and taught until the day he was taken up."

These two biblical books work together in partnership. And thus the Gospel ends with the Ascension and the Acts of the Apostles begins with the Ascension.

So the Ascension marks a transition both in Luke's story AND in the life of the early Church: the passing of the baton, so to speak -- from Jesus who is doing most of the speaking and acting in the Gospel -- to the disciples who in Acts are now doing most of the speaking and the acting.

So there are similarities in the accounts:

In both -- Jesus tells the apostles they will be **witnesses** of all he said and did -- that as we heard two weeks ago --

Jesus wants the disciple to know he expects them to carry on his ministry -- to do what he has been doing: and so he told them: "as I have loved you, so you also should love one another."

In both accounts the disciples are told to wait for the "**promise of the Father**" -- that is the gift of the Holy Spirit -- that will come upon them to empower them to be the witnesses that Christ calls them to be -- the faith event we will celebrate next week with the feast of Pentecost.

Another similarity is the **place of the Ascension** -- don't be thrown that in the Gospel it is said to occur in Bethany --

While in the Acts of the Apostles is said to occur on the Mount of Olives -- because the Mount of Olives **is** in Bethany -- just across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem. . .

A difference does occur in what is almost a comical moment in the Acts of the Apostles -- when the stunned disciples stand speechless -- heads turned heavenward. They look like you or I must look when a helium-filled balloon escapes our grasp and drifts slowly out of sight --- or like the munchkins in the Wizard of Oz who watch Glinda the good witch come and go in a bubble: we watch, and watch, and watch . . . until it disappears.

Something about that journey into the wild blue yonder is mesmerizing. Perhaps we're intrigued by the fact that something we held so close one moment could in the next moment be disappearing from our sight.

But as if to break that spell --- two men dressed in white garments, presumably angels -- say: "why are you standing there looking at the sky?"

It's as if the disciples, and quiet likely us -- need to be wakened from their idleness and begin the mission they were sent on: to be witnesses for Christ on this earth.

Yes, this was just no disappearing act on the part of Jesus. The ascension is riveting because it is through this action that Jesus seals His presence with us to the end of time.

And he goes with a promise on his lips: Jesus tells us today that not only will He be back -- but he will in reality be with us, all of us, always -- no matter how difficult the journey or dark the night.

In the midst of life's deep pains, losses, disappointments -- how good to keep before us this vision of Jesus, rising into heaven, looking on us with love. And knowing that he entrusts **us** to carry on his work -- so, it's time to stop just standing around -- and to get to work -- building the kingdom of God

Sure, we may want to cling to the old, familiar Jesus of the Gospel who did all the work -- as I am sure the disciples wanted to cling to him -- but we are given the mission not to cling -- but to embrace.

We are being sent out into the world to care for the people Jesus would have embraced – the poor, the marginal, those who are rejected by society, those who are weak or mentally ill. . .

It's easier for us to be Christians standing on a hillside gazing into the sky, longing for the good old days – but our mission is to move off that hill – to stop staring open-mouthed at the miracle of Jesus in our lives and **act** on that miracle – to witness, to serve as Christ's representatives here on earth.

It is then that we will really understand what it means to be a disciple of Christ and we, too, can “return to Jerusalem with great JOY.”