

**Feast of the Ascension**  
**May 17, 2015**  
**Acts 1:1-11; Eph 1:17-23; Mark 16:15-20**

It's a debatable point but perhaps the best Ascension story comes from Acts. To start with, Luke recaps his whole Gospel in a few opening lines reviewing Jesus' last 40 days on earth. He describes Jesus' post-resurrection activity as "giving instructions through the Holy Spirit."

In this, we see that Jesus was taking the disciples through a *process* rather than teaching them a *doctrine*. The end of Luke's Gospel indicates that the teaching of those 40 days was a process of recapping all their time together; revisiting every conversion Jesus had called for from the beginning. This was a process that didn't end with the resurrection or even the ascension, but which would only come to completion through the work of the Holy Spirit.

So at the end of the Easter appearances, Luke depicts the disciples as much in need of learning as they ever were.

As if they hadn't comprehended anything Jesus had been teaching for three years and 40 days, they asked him how soon all their dreams for the future would come true. Jesus patiently avoided their question and tried for the last time on earth to reorient them. "You will get it, you will understand what real power is, when you receive the Holy Spirit."

There are many ways that we could describe what Jesus wanted his disciples and their successors to understand. Paul said it in Ephesians 1 when he prayed that the "...eyes of our minds would be enlightened by the Spirit who offers wisdom and

revelation.” Of course, that very prayer is a reminder that by ourselves we are hardly the sources of wisdom, much less revelation.

Paul stated the same idea as an evangelical mandate in Ephesians 4 when he called on Christians to “live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” Here too, the very idea of “calling” urges us beyond all pretensions to self-sufficiency.

As Paul reminds us, we receive our call in community, where each is gifted and we are all called to the same hope.

When Luke describes Jesus’ last earthly activities and ascension, the final instruction to the disciples is that they should wait for the coming of the Spirit. When he disappeared and they were sky gazing, two men in white appeared and questioned why they were just standing around staring into space. That question brought their attention back to earth, where they were to pick up the task of being witnesses — a task they have handed on to us.

The Ascension might be our most whimsical feast. The story has nothing of the heaviness we heard at the Last Supper, when Jesus spoke of going away and being lifted up. When we look to the disciples as role models, we can be encouraged by their *never-ending need to learn* and be reconverted to Jesus’ message.

We know they did better than what Mark reported of the silent, frightened women, and although Mark didn’t mention it, we know the men were just as frightened. And yet we remember that as so many of them were martyred, faith didn’t deliver them from every danger.

Maybe this is our day to remember all that the Easter season has been. It's a chance to review our moments of encounter with Christ and our own calls to conversion. There's no reason we can't take time to do our own sky-gazing, knowing that there's more out there than a void. And if open up our hearts, the Spirit will lead us to be witnesses from wherever we are standing to the very ends of the earth.