

Pastor's Column

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Ascension—"Jesus Was Lifted Up, and a Cloud Took Him from Their Sight"

When we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension, we celebrate the absence of Jesus. He is physically gone from us. He is no longer with us as He once was.

When we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit, we celebrate the presence of Jesus in the new way in which He remains with the Church, until the end of time.

The gift of the Spirit is a profound realization that the Church is the Body of Christ. The Church is Jesus for this time and this place. It is the Church that continues the Mission and Ministry of Jesus in the here and now, in and through our flesh.

This distinction is at the heart of Christianity. Our God is not just "up in heaven." We are not theists that believe only in a God totally transcendent from us.

Our God is not only transcendent but also imminent. Our God is "down here on earth among us."

Christianity is incarnational. God is in our flesh and bones and comes to the world through us.

This distinction is the difference between theism and Christianity. Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, in *The Holy Longing*, describes it this way:

If my mother is sick and I pray that she gets better, but do not drive her to see the doctor, I have prayed as a theist, not as a Christian.

I have not given an incarnational flesh, skin, to my prayer. It is more difficult for God to answer such a prayer.

If I see a colleague or friend who looks depressed and pray for her, but do not speak to her, then I am praying like a theist, not as a Christian.

How is God supposed to console her? Send her an e-mail from heaven?

It is my voice and my compassion that is called for since I am a part of the Body of Christ, am praying, precisely through the Body of Christ, and am there, available to talk to her.

If I pray for a close friend but do not send him a postcard to tell him I am thinking about him, how is that prayer supposed to touch him?

If I pray for world peace, but do not, inside myself, forgive those who have hurt me, how can God bring about peace on this planet?

Our prayer needs our flesh to back it up.

As we move through these feasts of Ascension and Pentecost, may we be mindful that if we are feeling the absence of Jesus in our lives and in our world, it is because we are not relying upon the insight and strength of the Holy Spirit and we are not backing up our prayer with our flesh!

If we are asking "Where is Jesus in all of this?" maybe we should be asking, "Where am I in all of this?"

Fr. Mike