



Things to Ponder

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Ascension of the Lord – May 17th

Today in all areas of the United States but the Northeast, we celebrate the Ascension of Our Lord! Luke places the event forty days after the resurrection; but John describes it as happening on Easter Sunday. The whole point of celebrating these feasts as distinct is to point out that the Risen Lord did indeed appear to his closest friends to verify the fact of his resurrection and that at one point he left them to pave the way for the sending of the Spirit. The gospels of the previous Sundays and weekdays have been taken from John 14-17 (Jesus' Farewell Discourse). John situated this dialogue at the Last Supper before the glorious passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus repeatedly told his disciples that his departure was essential if they were to be empowered with the Holy Spirit. Despite this warning, I imagine the actual moment of the Ascension caught the disciples by surprise. They might have wondered: "What do we do now?" The two men dressed in white in Luke's account said to them:

"Men of Galilee, why are you standing
there looking at the sky?
(Acts 1, 11)

The command of the gospel is clear:

"Go into the whole world and proclaim
the gospel to every creature."
(Mark 16, 15)

The message to be proclaimed is no mere biblical interpretation, although it is rooted in the Bible; nor is it a code of ethics or path to personal inner peace. It is, rather, a living person - the Risen Lord Jesus! He is present among us now! Signs of his presence abound. The last half of Mark's gospel was added some time after the rest of the gospel was compiled. It is likely a reflection upon the early life of the Christian community and evidence of their awareness of the presence of the Risen and ascended Lord: exorcisms, new tongues, handling dangerous snakes, drinking deadly potions, healings ... What signs of Christ's presence do you see in our midst?

Sincerely in Christ,
Rev. Bill Foley

Olney, Maryland

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