

ASCENSION

On Sunday Fr Gabriel recalled a story concerning Archbishop Michael Ramsey. It brought to my mind another epic Ramsey story. It was Ascension Day at a time when after the Gospel there was a tradition of extinguishing the Paschal Candle as a symbol of the Lord's Ascension. After the Gospel the altar boy moved towards the Paschal Candle and everyone turned in expectation. The candle snuffer was lifted, but the candle was still alight! A second attempt but no it was still alight. After the third attempt the poor altar boy was successful. The Archbishop then sighed and said, "At last, I thought he was never going!"

What a day! An amazing day of hope - why?

Well this is what Paul is teaching us in the second reading from Ephesians, he writes "May he enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you can see the hope his call holds for you".

Do you see it? Do you see yourself as God sees you – because if you did you would not recognize yourself – you are radiant – shining.

Fr Gabriel Harty OP died at the age of 98 in 2019. For well over 70 years he had been a Dominican friar and was known as 'the rosary' priest. Fr Gabriel had travelled all over the world but particularly in his native Ireland to promote the bible and the beads.

On one occasion in the early 60's he was in a factory in Dublin giving a slide presentation of the mysteries of the Rosary, suddenly there was a break in the electricity and while it was being fixed the manager gave Fr Harty a cup of tea. As they were chatting the Manager took courage and said. "Father, your doing very well, but what the men here need is a living Jesus and the Jesus your talking about is very nice, but he seems to be dead!"

A living Jesus That is exactly what this solemnity of the Ascension is proclaiming; a Jesus who is alive! This is what we are witness of as the first reading reminds us. It was the very fact of his being alive that empowered the early disciples.

So, let us be very clear, the Ascension is not about saying goodbye to Jesus as he returns to heaven. It is not a sad farewell. The Ascension in no way separates us from Jesus, rather it takes us to a completely new and exciting level of relationship.

Let me take us back to the incarnation, to the birth of Jesus. How very mistaken we are when we somehow imagine that Jesus leaves his divinity behind – the birth at Bethlehem is God walking among us. Then when we come to the Ascension Jesus no more leaves his humanity behind. Here is the staggering truth. Now at this very moment in the very heart of the Trinity there is a wounded humanity. The Ascension, therefore, speaks of our inclusion in the life of God – it takes us to the very heart of everything.

I do not hope because it is a nice thing to do, because of what I manage to achieve or what others do for me. I am a man of hope because His very presence permeates who I am. What did we hear proclaimed: "They preach everywhere the Lord working with them".

Today is a day of tremendous hope because it speaks of our amazing dignity. In 2012 I was in Calcutta and met a cardiologist who was Mother Teresa's doctor. He was called to Mother House on the Evening of September 5th 1997 when Mother Teresa fell ill. On entering her room Mother

Teresa asked if he would take off her sandals as she did not want to meet Jesus with shoes on but be as poor as Him. Then she said, “Michael do you remember the prayer that I taught you as a little boy?” He replied that he did. “Will you pray that pray for me now?” so he did: “Jesus in my heart I believe in your tender love for me”.

He had no sooner finished the prayer when she died. Dr Michael went on to explain that as a heart surgeon he often held people’s hearts in his hands and prayed the prayer. So today, when you encounter disappointment, despair, uncertainty, or doubt then repeat that prayer and believe its truth: Jesus in my heart I believe in your tender love for me.

Abbot Robert Igo, OSB

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