

Ascension of Jesus into heaven

The exterior wall of the Tribune building in Chicago contains a number of unusual, protruding stones. Each of these stones is identified by a plaque telling where it originally came from. For example, there's a stone from the great pyramid of Egypt, there's a stone from the Taj Mahal of India, there's a stone from the Arch of Triumph of France, and- the latest addition— there's a stone from the Berlin Wall.

When the architect designed the building, he wanted to make the world present in it.

If the architect had designed the Tribune building today, he might have taken a different approach. He might have made the world present in it in an even more powerful way. For example, he might have filled the lobby of the building with a solid wall of television sets monitoring by satellite the great capitals of the world. Or, if he and the Tribune people wanted to outdo themselves, they might have made the world present in a remarkable, flesh-and-blood way, by stationing live representatives from the nations of the world in the lobby of the building.

This example illustrates an important point: there are varying ways and degrees of making something present. The stones in the wall of the Tribune building are one kind of presence. Live satellite TV coverage is another. And flesh-and-blood representatives are yet another .

This brings us to the great feast that we celebrate the feast of the Ascension of Jesus into heaven.

This feast does not celebrate the *end* of Jesus' presence in the world. On the contrary, it celebrates a *change* in the way Jesus is present in the world. It celebrates the fact that Jesus is no longer present in the world through his *human body in a physical way*. **Jesus is now present in the world through his *mystical body in a spiritual way***. He is present through his Church: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name," Jesus said, "there am I in the midst of them." Matthew 18:20

And so the feast of the Ascension does not mark the end of Jesus' presence in the world. It simply marks the change in the way Jesus is present in the world. Jesus is now present through us, his followers. This leads us to an even more important point.

The Ascension marks not only a change in Jesus' *presence* in the world. It also marks a change in Jesus' *activity* in the world. Jesus no longer acts *through the* members of his physical body, *but through the* members of his mystical body.

To put it in another way, Jesus no longer acts by using his own human voice to address people, his own human heart to love people, and human hands to reach out to people. Rather, he acts

through us—you and me. He uses our voice to address people, our heart to love people, and our hands to reach out to people. This is what we celebrate on this great feast.

On this day 2,000 years ago, Jesus passed on to us, his followers, and the responsibility to let him be present in our modern world. On this day 2,000 years ago, Jesus passed on to us, his followers, the responsibility to let him continue to speak, love, and reach out to people in our modern world. On this day 2,000 years ago, Jesus passed on to us, his followers, and the responsibility to let him continue to work in our modern world.

This is the reason that we gathered together here today. This is the mystery that we celebrate in this liturgy today. This is the challenge that Scripture holds out to us today.

Let's close with a prayer that sums up what we have been trying to say: God of mercy and love, look down upon your children, gathered here about your Son's table. Give us a new mind to appreciate our calling: to be the new body by which your Son is present in our world. Give us a new heart to carry out our calling: to be the new voice, the new heart, and the new hands by which your Son acts in our world. Give us a new spirit to be what we are: the new body by which your Son speaks, loves, and reaches out to people in modern times.