

HOMILY FOR ASCENSION SUNDAY 2022

We are used to sequels. James Bond, Star Wars and, at present the theatres currently have Top Gun and Jurassic Park. A sequel continues a story or develops a theme from an earlier one.

We have a sequel in the readings for this weekend. We've just heard the last words of Luke's Gospel and, earlier, the first words of Luke's Acts of the Apostles. Both written by the same person to a man named Theophilus, whoever he was.

For Luke, the sequel is that the end of Jesus Christ's time on earth becomes the beginning of the activities of the Apostles and the building of a People of God whom we know as the Church – us – the Body of Christ. History has many sequels of how the Church has developed since then but, the theme of witnessing to the Good News of God's love has not changed. The story of struggle and suffering erupting into resurrection and hope has not changed. It just looks different, depending upon who we are telling the story to.

Ascension reminds us that Jesus had to go somewhere. He had already had his funeral, for what it was. Now as the resurrected one, he had no place on earth and so, the next step was heaven where he continued to be the Son of God. Of course, he had never stopped being the Son of God.

He was present at creation with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Author, Richard Rohr, speaks of how something like the 'DNA' of 'the Son' is a part of creation because he was there its beginning. The Christ – the chosen one of God – 'the Son' - has always been intrinsically involved with the creation but, at a point in history some 2000 years ago, he left the heavenly realm to fully engage in creation as a human being.

This was in order to redeem creation – to bring it back to its rightful place in relationship with God. The most significant task in this was the defeat of death. From there, we Christians have been involved in an ongoing commitment to bring all people into relationship with God.

This ongoing work of bringing people into loving relationship with God is the work of the Church. Yet, it does not happen alone. We are helped by the Holy Spirit. This is 'the power from on high' which Jesus speaks about in the Gospel. It is left to individuals to respond to and, individuals can certainly disrupt it but, it is intended for a community to act upon.

So, the Ascension, develops this next part of the sequel by bringing us to task and enabling us to participate in this work of Salvation in the midst of community.

Jesus, the man, departs and sits at the right hand of the Father and everything is placed under his feet.

The disciples might have certainly felt 'under his feet' as they watched his ascent into heaven. The feet might have been the last thing they saw of him.

Interestingly, on the Mount of Olives near Bethany outside of Jerusalem today, a very small chapel covers a rock which is said to be the point from which Jesus ascended.

There appears to be a footprint in the rock which might suggest that Jesus pressed hard as he ascended. It is more likely that over time, many pilgrims wanted to place their feet where Jesus

had had his foot. This white Jerusalem stone does wear down from people constantly rubbing against it. What looks like a footprint, could be wear and tear from the many feet of pilgrims.

However, that in itself is symbolic of the work of the Church – that we keep reminding the world that God made a footprint on the face of the earth when Jesus Christ came into this broken world.

That does beg the question, if we're a part of the sequel, what are we doing to bear witness to that footprint in the life of this world, here and now? A footprint of sacrificial love, faith, forgiveness and commitment to all creation?