

## Seventh Sunday of Eastertide

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

It is strange that the Church celebrates the Lord's Ascension with such joy. Departures, especially those of friends and particularly when there is no immediate prospect of their return, are generally sad events. A later chapter of the Acts of the Apostles describes in graphic terms how upset his friends at Ephesus were when they had to take leave of Paul: "*they were all in tears, they put their arms round Paul's neck and kissed him; what saddened them most was his saying they would never see his face again.*" (Acts 20, 37 - 38) The disciples who saw Jesus depart on the Mount of Olives were bewildered rather than sad. They returned to Jerusalem to the upper room - many of us are in our own "upper room" in these continuing days of lockdown - and there, Luke tells us, they prayed continuously. Any sadness they may have felt at the departure of Jesus was mitigated by the important mission he had given them. The kingdom of God, which Jesus made central to his teaching as an itinerant rabbi in Galilee and Judaea, needed to be preached to the ends of the earth. There were countless people in the Mediterranean world who had never heard of Jesus. The disciples knew that beyond the confines of Palestine there were many "God-fearing" people who were curious about the religion of the Jews and lived on the margins of the synagogues of the diaspora. There were many people searching for God. These were to become the target audience of the Apostles and the early Christians as they brought the message of Jesus to a waiting world. Their excitement about what lay ahead of them tempered the sadness they may have felt as they saw Jesus ascending into heaven. Not only did they believe he would return soon but they also realised that he had mandated them, unworthy though they may have felt themselves to be, to carry on his work.

The Ascension marks our coming of age, it marks the moment when we realise that all of us has a specific calling ourselves to be heralds of the Good News and agents of the spread of the kingdom of God. The Jesus who ascended into glory wants us, on his behalf, to get on with completing the work of evangelisation he had come to launch. And that was precisely what the disciples realised as they returned to Jerusalem. They were in touch with their own inadequacies, they were unsure of whether or not they were capable of doing what Jesus asked of them, they knew that they needed help in carrying out their mission. Hence the urgency of their prayer: *with one heart all these joined constantly in prayer* (Acts 1, 14). They remembered that Jesus had promised an advocate. A paraclete would be sent to them to help them. They prayed that they might be prepared for the paraclete when he came. They prayed too that the Spirit would come with the gifts which would empower and enable them to carry out the mission Jesus had asked them to fulfil. Not only does the Spirit come on the whole Church at Pentecost, but each individual sacrament we receive is accompanied by an endowment with God's spirit. Thus, this week our suburban dwelling, flat, apartment or room is our "upper room" and the challenge to us, in these very challenging times, is to join our voice to that of the first disciples and beg for the Spirit so that we too can '*renew the face of the earth*'.

**Father Patrick**