

## Short Address – Ascension Day 2020

Certain moments remain with us. I wonder if you, like me, can vividly remember your last day at High School, as we walked through the gates for the last time and looked back and felt the ending inside us, a solemnity that weighed heavy upon us. I felt the same at the end of college when, exams done, and parties celebrated there was nothing to do but pack your things and drive away. How quickly any sadness was swept away by the new beginning that called us in the hopes and dreams of what was yet to come.

In every end there is a beginning and, in every beginning, there is an end.

The event we celebrate today is both an end and a beginning. At the Ascension, the disciples see the risen Jesus for the last time. The physical presence that walked and taught, laughed and cried with them is leaving. It is the end of an era for them.

And yet, even as they look up after him, like people looking at the point of the horizon long after the boat has slipped from view, even as they look,

the two angels in account in Acts, snap them out of their reverie, and then the beginning takes them.

Just as I remember as a graduate driving away from the city I studied in for the last time, how any sadness in the ending was swept away by the great call of life that lay ahead, so the disciples are taken by this new beginning, taken by the promise of the future, and of power from on high. This Jesus that stood by them and ate with them is now no longer confined to the limitations of the physical world, being only able to be present in one place at one time. Now he can be present everywhere and at all times.

As the 19<sup>th</sup> Century American poet, John Greenleaf Whittier put it:

“I know not where his islands lift  
Their fronded palms in air; I only know I  
cannot drift Beyond his love and care.”

So the disciples are filled with joy and are continually praising God in the Temple. And we should be joyful too. For we have received the Holy Spirit, the power from on high, (though we are always needing to receive him anew.)

We know that Christ can be sought and found wherever we are.

And above all we know that we have a friend in the heavens, an advocate on high, so that, even when we die, we will not go alone into the dark, but rather we will go to him.

Endings and beginnings. In this strange time, where we see so many endings, tragic and permanent as well as painful but temporary, we are also aware that our God is the God of beginnings. The Ascension reminds us that we are sent, like the first disciples, with a purpose to do the work of Christ in the world. We are also waiting to be equipped with power from on high. The power will always be all we need to be able to do whatever we are called to do.