

Feast of the Ascension - C

Here's a story about a woman named Mary:

Mary had been a good Catholic all her life, doing her best to take care of her family, being a friend to the poor and lonely, and showing concern for what was going on in the wider world around her.

As Mary got on in years she thought more and more about the kingdom of heaven and couldn't wait to see the many loved ones who had gone before her.

As the light gently faded in her life, she passed on one day from this world into the life to come and arrived at the gates of heaven.

Because of her faith in God and the quality of her life, she was admitted into heaven, but she couldn't find anyone she had known in this life.

She asked one of the angels, "Could you direct me to where my parents are, my husband, the many friends that I know are here somewhere?"

The angel replied, "Sorry, but it doesn't work that way. Once a person dies, they lose their individuality. They become one of the "great multitude" of the saints, but you can't really pick them out of the crowd."

That doesn't sound right, does it? That's not what we are hoping for from the life to come, is it?

And yet, we have to admit, that we really don't know what heaven will be like, and we have a tendency to project our own wishes onto the reality that is.

Are there any assurances that we can have to anchor our hopes to see the loved ones who have gone before us?

I would like to propose that the Feast of the Ascension of Jesus into heaven does just that.

The Ascension gives us a chance to think about the uniqueness of Jesus as God and man, and to honor his enthronement as Lord, but it also points to the uniqueness and value of each human life.

It would have been possible for God, when seeing that the world needed to be saved, to choose other means of doing so.

But the means he did choose involved the Son of God becoming human, not just for a time, but once and for all.

Because Jesus' human being does not cease with his resurrection or ascension, the particularity of his human personhood continues on into eternity.

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That means that our personhood, our individuality, will not melt away into nothingness with death either.

Jesus is the first born of the dead. What happened to him is what is designed to happen to us.

We are intended for eternity as unique individuals of the human race.

That's what makes it so impossible to ever acquiesce to the fact of abortion. I've never seen an aborted fetus, but apparently it's possible for those involved in the abortion industry to think of him or her as nothing more than one of the many: no individuality, no eternal identity.

But if that is the case, then we have no hope. If God has not made them unique in their individuality, in their very DNA, then there's really no reason to think that our individuality goes beyond the grave, either.

The Ascension of Jesus into heaven is a proclamation that when God acts, it's for all eternity. Even the Son of God, who is with the Father and the Holy Spirit before the beginning, will, from the moment of his conception, be forevermore known as Jesus, the Son of Mary.

The Ascension has as one of its effects the message that each human life is unique and valuable, each person has

dignity that's not ours to give or take away.

That's a saving story that each of us needs to hear, deserves to hear. And for those of us who have heard it, we have a commission to share it with others.

In the last verses of the ascension scene in Acts, the two men who greeted the women at the tomb, reappear.

Here they address the apostles: "Why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

They are told, in a sense, to get to work. We are to be busy about letting everyone know that Jesus will return and take with him "those who are eagerly waiting for him."

That would be us, but also those others whose hearts long, whether they can articulate it or not, for fulfillment and endless peace in the presence of God.

The world awaits the Good News, and today, we see once again, how good it is and how deserving of being shared.