

We Live in Joyful Hope

This Sunday, we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord to heaven. We say celebrate because we truly have cause for celebration. The Ascension is a celebration of joyful hope. With Jesus' ascension, we too have the hope and joyful expectancy of heaven.

St. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, said that God raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand 'far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.' (Eph. 1: 21)

Jesus told His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them in His Father's house. And He said to them: 'And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.' (Jn 14: 3) When Jesus ascended to heaven, He left His disciples with the hope that they too would one day be with Him.

Many people, when they hope for something, are not filled with confidence because they think that they are relying on chance or luck and most of us don't like to do that.

But Christian hope is different. Many years ago, I had the concept of Christian hope explained to me this way:

When we buy a lottery ticket, we hope that we will win but we know that the odds are pretty slim. It is said that one's chances of being struck by lightning are better than the odds of winning the lottery. We don't feel particularly confident. We hope that we get lucky.

But Christian hope is like checking the numbers drawn in the lottery and realizing that you have won! All you have to do is claim your prize. You might then say: I'm going to take a little time to figure out what I will do with the money but I hope to go down to the lottery office to pick up my winnings on June 1. You know that you have already won and you hope to pick up your prize someday soon.

We know that we have won the big prize, the biggest prize. And we have the joyful hope of one day being in heaven to spend the rest of eternity with God. It is then that we will collect our prize.

In the meantime, we need to be careful that we do not become like Jesus' disciples who were standing around gazing up into the sky. A couple of angels jogged them back to reality saying: 'Why do you stand looking up toward heaven?' (Acts 1: 11)

Jesus left them and us to continue His mission of salvation here on earth; to 'make disciples of all nations...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.' (Matt. 28: 19, 20) We can do this confidently knowing that Jesus said that 'I will not leave you orphaned' (Jn 14: 18) and 'I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.' (Jn 14: 20)

With the help of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, we can confidently continue Jesus' mission on earth as we live in the joyful hope of one day being able to join Him in heaven.