

MAY 16, 2021

FEAST OF THE ASCENSION

The Church of

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Office staffed T, W and Th, as we are able.

We continue to offer three masses each week to enable people to attend while maintaining appropriate social distancing. The Sunday 9:30 am mass continues to be live streamed on our Facebook page. We are also offering a Saturday 5:00 pm mass and a Sunday 12:00 pm (noon) mass.

Although state capacity restrictions have been lifted, we must still maintain six feet of physical distancing between groups, which means that our attendance is still limited. The 9:30 mass is the most popular. When your schedule allows, please consider attending one of the other two services.

Attendance at mass is still NOT required. Please make choices that keep you and the community safe.

Fr. Joe and the staff hold you all in our prayers, and ask that you pray for us and for all the essential workers who are striving to keep things running.

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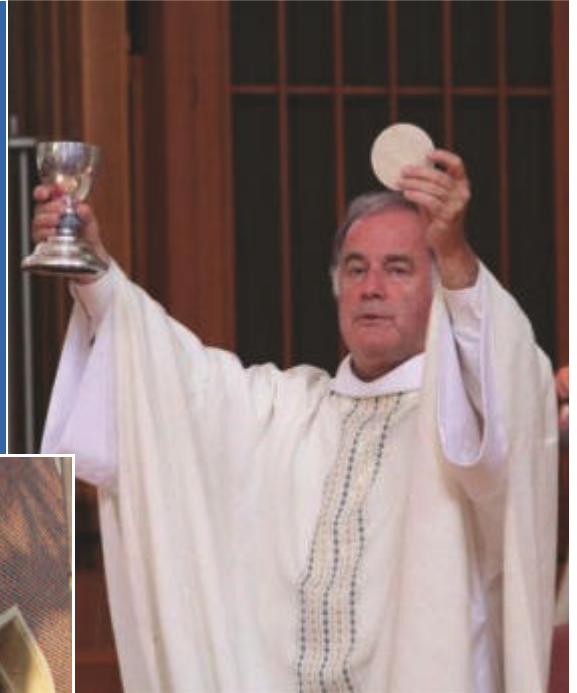
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*"I am with you
always,
even to the end
of the earth."
Jesus*



*Say YES to
love and peace.
Amen! Alleluia!*



www.saintalbertthegreat.org

This week at St. Albert's

(masses and intentions are in **BOLD** type)

*During the pandemic, we are offering **three** masses per weekend to help attendees maintain social distancing. Fr. Joe is still celebrating private daily masses for the intentions below.*

Saturday, May 15 –

5:00 pm mass Rose Holland †

Sunday, May 16 –

9:30 am mass – Jerry Shannon †

12:00 pm mass – Bill Brown †

Monday, May 17 – Bill Gulla †

Tuesday, May 18 – Genevieve McCarr †

Thursday, May 20 – Betty Schuster †

12:00 to 3:00 pm Crafters in the Social Hall

Friday, May 21 – Steve Huelsman †

Saturday, May 22 –

5:00 pm mass Genevieve McCarr †

Sunday, May 23 –

9:30 am mass – Lee Bauers †

12:00 pm mass – Genevieve McCarr †

In our prayers

We remember those who need healing, including Michael Callaghan, Al McMurray, Joan Ellison, Curt Huovie, John Fink, Ben Wilkie, Marianne Green, Rosella Messenbrink, Dave Buck.

Please add a prayer for those who have died, including the many dozens of Afghani schoolgirls killed and injured in the past week's bombing in Kabul.

Due to HIPAA privacy standards, hospitals and care centers cannot notify us of your need for our prayers or visits unless you direct them to call.

If you or someone you know would like to be included in our prayers, or have the Sacrament of the Sick, or communion brought to you, please let the office know at 612-724-3643. Messages are checked regularly.

A new request for mass-goers:

Because the 9:30 am Sunday mass is getting so popular, we ask that those who arrive first fill in the **MIDDLE** designated spots in a pew. This will help keep all available spots accessible. Please cooperate with ushers who may ask this of you. Thanks!

To request that the Eucharist be brought to you at your home, please contact Fr. Joe at 612-245-3345, or Jim Curran at 612-483-1546.

Volunteers will mask and safely deliver communion to you.

As you consider returning to in-person mass:

- * **We are continuing to offer three Masses each weekend for those who wish to attend in person at 5 PM Saturday and at 9:30 and noon on Sunday. We encourage those who are age 65 or older or who have underlying health conditions to stay home and view the 9:30 AM livestream. Anyone with symptoms or recent exposure to COVID-19 must remain at home.**
- * **ONLY Front center church doors are open, along with the elevator entrance. (One household at a time in elevator.)**
- * Although we have previously asked that people separate themselves alphabetically by last name, you may attend the service that is convenient for you. The 9:30 AM Mass is the most popular, and we have recently come close to capacity limits. If you have the flexibility to attend at 5 PM Saturday or noon on Sunday, we invite you to do that. We have not yet had to turn anyone away due to overcrowding, but we will regretfully do this if we run out of space at any liturgy.
- * **Thank you for wearing your masks!** This important health measure is still *required* in the state of Minnesota until we reach vaccination targets. Please remember that your mask must cover both your nose and mouth and that you should keep it on for the entire time you are in church except when receiving communion. If you need a mask, we have disposable ones available.
- * As appealing as our music is at masses with cantors, we ask you **NOT to sing, even while masked.** This is a precaution the Archdiocese recommends, as even when we keep six feet apart, viruses can still travel further through the air when propelled by speech or singing.
- * **Please sit in marked spaces with members of your group only.** A group can consist of people from the same household or from two households that are part of a pre-existing "pod." It can also include any number of individuals who attend together and have been fully vaccinated, which means that it has been at least two weeks since the final vaccine dose. We have marked three spaces in each open pew which are spaced out to ensure that people remain six feet apart. Please sit at one of these spaces. Larger groups may need to occupy two spots. *Do not sit in an available spot if you cannot maintain six feet of separation from people who are already seated in that pew.*
- * We have been blessed recently with some delightful weather, but we expect to see a variety of temperatures in the coming months. **Please dress appropriately** for a church that will have its front door and all of its windows open even when we would normally be running the heat or the air conditioning. Also, please do not close or adjust the windows.
- * **We have resumed the distribution of communion during its proper place in the liturgy.** You may return to your seats after receiving communion. If you are not comfortable with this, you may also leave immediately after reception.
- * Please exit the church immediately after the dismissal and move away from the front doors to ensure a path for other people to exit. The only people remaining in church will be staff and volunteers who are cleaning the church in preparation for the next service. You are welcome to have conversations outside with appropriate physical distancing.

"So, kiss me and smile for me, tell me that you'll wait for me, hold me like you'll never let me go."

"It won't be too hard to find his room", the nurse said. "Just listen for the voice of John Denver. This week, I think it's the jet plane song." She was right. I followed the music softly playing in Jimmy's room and introduced myself. He was neatly dressed, sitting in a rocking chair and looking out the window. Insisting on getting up to greet me, he said, "Never fall and break your hip. Seven weeks in a place like this is enough to drive anyone crazy." Jimmy's CD continued to play John Denver singing: "All my bags are packed, I'm ready to go. I'm standing here outside your door. I hate to wake you to say goodbye. But the dawn is breaking, its early morn, the taxi's waiting, he is blowing his horn. Already, I am so lonesome I could cry. I'm leaving on a jet plane. I don't know when I'll be back again, Oh, babe, I hate to go."

"Do you like John Denver?" It seemed more like a rhetorical question, but I ventured forth with a "Yes." Jimmy indicated that both he and his late wife, Marge, were passionate about John Denver's music. Having lived in the City of Denver for many years, both Jimmy and Marge basked in the presence of "The Rocky Mountain High" and found John Denver's lyrics a source of comfort and joy. "After Marge died three years ago" he said, "I find comfort in knowing that she is always around me, like she never really left. It's like having sunshine on my shoulder." I thought it sounded as if a new song were about to begin, but then he looked at me, tears filling his eyes and quietly mouthed the lyrics: "There's so many times I've let you down, so many times I've played around. I tell you now, they do not mean a thing. Every place I go, I think of you, every song I sing, I sing for you. When I come back, I'll wear your wedding ring."

Grief is one of those human situations that easily transcends any normal sense of time. Grief is a cluster of ordinary human emotions swirling around the specific context of a loss. Easily drawing us into blurred boundaries, confusion becomes the hallmark of grief. Even when predictable patterns and stages of grief are normally delineated and rationally understood, the loss of a loved one can easily throw any one of us into a tailspin, producing a sense of hopelessness and uncertainty. However, the paradoxical sense of rediscovering the presence of a loved one in their absence is the nurturing of hope. Perhaps the poetic sense of "absence makes the heart grow fonder" is the first sign of normality and the beginning of a newly found clarity. The lyrics of John Denver's songs, at least for Jimmy, offered a communion with his wife that transcended any sense of normal time and space. Having been married to Marge for 58 years, Jimmy lived in and through the lyrics of Denver's recordings as a catalyst of remembrance. Much like an old Marine might listen to the Marine Anthem as a way of staying connected to his buddies, both living and dead, Jimmy remained connected to Marge.

Jesus was clear that he had to leave his disciples for them to continue the mission of the church, but he promised them he would be present to them in his absence. An abiding sense of presence has "ghost like qualities" for the living, but the "missing presence" becomes a genuine source of strength when accompanied by faith and hope. I have a vivid memory of finding my mother crying one morning while sitting in her living room and listening to the radio. When I asked her what was wrong, she smiled and said: "I just finished dancing with your father." She had been listening to their favorite song, "Let me call you sweetheart." In all the twenty-two years she remained a widow, I honestly believed that my father was with her day and night. Grief does have its delusional characteristics, but abiding love does have a way of integrating a sense of presence even in absence without sounding cuckoo.

This Sunday we are celebrating the Feast of the Ascension. The Feast, mentioned in all the gospel accounts and the Acts of the Apostles, corroborates references to the Ascension in the Epistles of Paul. The feast commemorates the absence of Jesus from the apostolic community. While

Jesus is "*taken up into heaven and placed at the right hand of God*" (Mark 18:15-20), his farewell is not marked so much by grief, but joy. Jesus' absence would be "necessary" to inaugurate the mission of the disciples. Once Jesus ascended into heaven, "*They went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.*"

Somewhat the farewell of Jesus turned into an abiding sense of presence with the disciples. Transcending time and space, Jesus' absence gave them courage and strength of conviction. Despite their flabby faith, they preached the good news with renewed vigor. Armed with the power to cast out demons, the ability of speaking in tongues, and the gift of healing found in Mark's account, Paul in the Letter to the Ephesians (4:1-13) recounts the gifts Jesus gave to the disciples: "*Some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors, some teachers.*" The whole point of Jesus' ascension would be to "*equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the Body of Christ.*" In an odd way, the absence of Jesus from the community would be marked by a sense of hope and promise rather than by sadness and grief. His promise "*to work with them*" would provide the paradoxical conclusion of his abiding presence even in his absence.

The abruptness of unexpected "comings and goings" can catch us off guard and leave us uncertain regarding the future directions of our lives. Certainly, the various accounts of Jesus' ascension generated levels of bafflement in the early church. The narratives are confusing regarding the timing of Jesus' ascension, but the underlying theme of "continued presence even in his absence" became the enduring element of hope in a fledgling church.

In Matthew's account (28:16-20) Jesus assured his disciples, "*I am with you always, even to the end of the earth.*" In Luke's account (24:50-53), Jesus "*blessed them and he parted with them. And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God.*" In Mark's version (16:9-20), after Jesus ascended, the disciples "*went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it.*" John's farewell address, chapters 14 through 17, gave the disciples repeated instructions and assurances that after his leaving, the Holy Spirit would come and provide a constant sense of his presence among them. In the Acts of the Apostles (1:1-11), right before "*He was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight,*" Jesus assured his disciples that they would be "*His witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" Perhaps the comforting conclusion for the disciples was "*they would not be left alone*" to try to organize the new church. Maintaining some semblance of unity amid diversity remains the ongoing challenge of the Church, especially today.

Leaving Jimmy's room, I felt a certain level of nostalgia in remembering all the people who have come and gone in my lifetime. Family and friends who have died, hundreds of students and parishioners who have ascended from my life and all the four-legged creatures (dogs) who offered me unconditional love, even if I had left them far too long. They are all still part of me.

"Now the time has come for me to leave you. One more time, let me kiss you. Then close your eyes, and I'll be on my way. Dream about the days to come when I won't have to leave alone."

*Peace,
Fr. Joe Gillespie, O.P.*



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