

16 May 2021

Sermons: Homecoming

So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to the disciples, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19).

Every year when I was growing up, I looked forward to our family summer vacation. During the weeks leading up to the event I would think about spending time with our relatives in New Brunswick or New England. I would look at my father's highway maps to trace the route we would follow and the places we would stop and visit along the way. During our holiday, we spent time with many people and saw a lot of things. When we started our journey home, I would often feel sad that it would be a whole year before we would see our extended family again. Yet, I also missed the familiar comforts of our house in Oshawa. As the miles past, I began to really look forward to being at home. In some ways, homecoming was the best part of the trip.

In today's Gospel, Jesus ascends into heaven and rejoins his Father. By doing so, he completes his earthly mission and returns to his rightful place.

Christ's divine status was a key theme found throughout Mark's Gospel. In the first verse of his Gospel the evangelist identified Jesus as "the Son of God" (**Mark 1:1**). Yet, as shown in the stories of Christ's early ministry such as the Exorcism at Capernaum (**Mark 1:25**) and the Healing of Leper (**Mark 1:44**) his full identity was deliberately hidden from those with whom he interacted. This was likely because Mark thought the identity of Jesus could not be understood until after his death and resurrection. Later, at the Transfiguration, Jesus is called "my Son, the Beloved" by a voice from a cloud in the presence of three disciples (**Mark 9:7**). During his trial before the High Priest and Elders Christ admitted he was "Son of Man" seated at the right hand of God (**Mark 14:62**) but this was used for his conviction of blasphemy. Finally, as Jesus died on the cross, the Roman Centurion said "Truly, this man was God's Son" (**Mark 15:39**). Clearly, Mark defended belief in Christ's divine status but recognized it could be misunderstood. When the original conclusion of Mark's Gospel ended with the women at the tomb remaining silent about the resurrection (**Mark 16:8**) the result was confusion about the meaning of the Gospel. With the added appendix, Christ's Ascension into heaven confirmed his divine status.

During this Covid-19 pandemic it is understandable to think we are a long way from home. The numbers of cases and deaths is in flux. Advice about the effectiveness of certain vaccines changes periodically which undermines public confidence. No one knows how long it will be until this pandemic is over. We want to get back to the comfortable existence most of us had before the pandemic. For Catholics and other people of faith, our true home lies beyond this life. For those of us who are older, the end of our earthly journey seems a far way off and Covid-19 seems to make the distance seem longer. At times like this we need to remember that every part of a trip comes to an end. We may be gathering with family and friends, looking for a parking spot at the mall and travelling to foreign destinations sooner than we think. When we do we may appreciate what we can do a little more, thanks to the pandemic. But most importantly, we need to remember we are not alone on our journey. We still have the company of family, friends and neighbours (even when we can't be physically near them), the presence of the Church and Christ its head. Jesus walks beside us for every step of our earthly journey. As a human, he understood the reality of sickness and death. As God's Divine Son, his grace helps us overcome life's many challenges and draws us toward our true home.

It might take a while for us to pass through this Covid-19 part of our life's journey. But, the longer we keep going the closer we are to our destination. The homecoming we desire on earth (and in heaven) is certain, we just need to be patient.

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