

The Ascension of the Lord
The Power of the Body of Christ

Saint Teresa of Avila, a Spanish nun and mystic, who lived during the 16th century has a quote that I want to share with you today. She once wrote, "Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours." What is she getting at here? Part of the answer can be found in the scripture readings today as we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord.

The first reading taken from St. Luke's Acts of the Apostles gives us a vivid image of the ascension of the Lord. Luke tells us that as Jesus was engaged in conversation with his apostles that he was suddenly "lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight." Two angels had to explain to them what had just happened.

St. Paul in the second reading tells us that once Jesus arrived in heaven he took his place at God's "right hand." In St. Paul's day to sit at the right hand of a king was to sit at a place of honor that gave that person a share in the power and authority of the king. And so St. Paul tells us that God made Jesus head of the church which is his body. In other words, all the baptized make up what is called in scripture "the Body of Christ."

Since Jesus is at God's right hand in heaven we are his body now here on earth. We are his hands and feet here on earth. Jesus works in and through us. He gives us our "marching orders" in the gospel reading where he tells us "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature." We do this by how we live our lives, by what we say and do.

There is power that comes from being part of the Body of Christ. Fr. Ron Rolheiser, a Catholic priest and writer, tells the story about a friend of his who is an all-around "good guy" but for a variety of reasons seldom practices his faith by going to church and receiving the sacraments. As his friend got older he began to realize that there was something missing from

his life but he still clung to his agnostic ways. He told Rolheiser, “I guess if there’s a heaven, I won’t be part of it. Rolheiser in response tells him “Don’t worry about heaven. You’ll be there! Too many of us love you! A lot of us, church people, including me, won’t accept a heaven that doesn’t have you in it.”

How can Rolheiser say this? Perhaps because he agrees with St. Teresa of Avila and scripture that we are the Body of Christ, that we are Jesus’ body, that we are Jesus’ hands and feet in the world. Another way of putting this is that the incarnation was not just a onetime blimp in history but rather God is still taking on real flesh inside of us, the community of believers.

Rolheiser argues, “We ARE the Body of Christ on earth. We’re not a replacement for Jesus’ body, not a representation of it.... We ARE his body and, as such, are meant to do all the things he did” – loving, forgiving, healing, etc.

He believes that “we can link those we love (our children, our siblings, our friends, our colleagues, and anyone who is sincere) to salvation, to heaven.... We can say to God “My heaven includes those I love.... [Those people] must, of course, at some point, still make a personal choice to belong, but as long as our love is there, that person is solidly connected to the Body of Christ.”

Part of this is mystery but part of it we understand from our experience of love and family. A loving mother, for example, knows that the family still includes a given child, even if that child is struggling in ways that don’t allow for him or her to be at home.

Do you understand the power you possess as being part of the Body of Christ? If so, are you willing to use it?

