

Today we celebrate the feast of the Ascension, the completion of the rising of Jesus we celebrated 40 days ago on Easter. Jesus, the scriptures and the witnesses tell us, returned body and soul to his father and our father. He had done the work he was sent to do, and worked the salvation of our human condition.

He accomplished that task through a humble act of descending, descending entirely and completely into our human condition, climbing down, as the word **condescending** means in its original positive usage, climbing down from on high to be with us.

He entered fully into the mess and muck of our humanity,
our fragility and uncertainty. He made gracious allowance for our frailty and fragility, climbing down into our human flesh, and on an awful Friday afternoon, he made the final descent, and was laid to rest in the cold dark stony world he had created and came to save.

He descended into death itself, he descended into hell, and broke its bonds, set free those who had gone before him into the dark, and in the light of his rising up showed us all the way home. He lit the way of hope that belongs to us because he has called us to follow him, out of death and into life.

Yet today, oddly enough, is a kind of Christmas eve. This feast of the Ascension of Jesus is a preface, a preparation for next week's celebration of Pentecost, the descent of Jesus' own spirit upon his disciples, into his disciples, a feast of incarnation no less than Christmas, when the word becomes flesh, yet now in us, not only in him.

We believe that in the beginning, before the beginning, the spirit of God hovered over the primordial chaos, over the waters. God spoke a word of creation, and there was light. God saw our frailty and climbed down from on high, born as Mary's son, to show us the way up out of darkness. God's spirit descends as Jesus ascends to the father, and makes something new, makes all things new.

Something new is created: a community of belief and hope,
a community bound together in the fire of love that unites us despite our differences.

The descending spirit calls from us deeds of generosity and power that mirror his deeds, and as Jesus himself said, are greater than his own deeds.

The disciples breathed in that spirit, that inspiration, that breathing in. But the spirit is not to be held onto; for we know that if we hold our breath we die. Rather the Spirit is breathed in to give us life and hope, but not held onto. Rather, the breath of the spirit is given to be shared, breathed out again, now by us, extended, passed on.

In the baptism that Jesus bids his disciples to share with the world, in the confirmation we receive as our young people received sacramentally two weeks ago, in the sharing of this table where we continue to be nourished by the body and blood of the Lord Jesus, becoming what we receive;

Now, truly, wonderfully, the spirit is given anew in the daily acts of charity and love we share, even as Jesus shared his love in his loving descent among us.

Jesus descended and ascended; the spirit was poured out and yet remains, ever to be shared. Great and wonderful is the mystery of our faith.