

I turned and looked up, and he was gone. In an instant, my heart sank. I was confused. I wasn't sure where to look and I felt alone because, in that moment, I had lost Jesus. Valérie and I were in Hawai'i for our 20th wedding anniversary. Here we were, in paradise, and Jesus was not there. Or at least, I couldn't see him. You see, for years, Valérie and I had sat in the same pew of St. Mary and so every Sunday was the same. We would approach the Eucharistic minister, I would receive, say "Amen", take a diagonal step forward to the right, cock my head up 70 degrees and to the left, and see Jesus, right there, as I consumed the host. But, that first Sunday in Hawai'i, I looked up, and he was gone. Now, I admit that it was a fleeting moment of disorientation and I felt a bit silly as I returned to the pew reminding myself that I had just received Jesus in the Eucharist and in the Word. That I was surrounded by the Body of Christ in the church. Plus, when I looked around, I thought, "there he is, right there," he was not gone, but still present. I realized that it said a lot about me and my sense of routine and the comfort it brings. Looking back, the fact that it happened is not interesting to me. No, what is interesting to me now is that, 10 years later, I still remember that feeling when I looked up and I couldn't see Jesus.

In today's readings, we have a unique occurrence. We hear the same story twice. Both the beginning of the Book of Acts and the end of the Gospel of Luke tell us of Jesus' Ascension into Heaven. They tell the same story but with a slightly different emphasis. In the Gospel, Jesus is continuing to open the Scriptures for the disciples and is giving them their final instructions to prepare for Pentecost. As he blessed them, Jesus Ascended, and they rejoiced. They did not continue to look for Jesus because Jesus was now in their hearts, bringing the joy that can only come when he is there. The emphasis in this reading is on *spiritual* realities.

What we see in the Book of Acts tells us something different, something decidedly human. After everything that the disciples had heard and seen during the Earthly ministry of Jesus. Witnessing his crucifixion and experiencing the reality of his resurrection. After spending 40 days with the resurrected Jesus, when the time comes, what is in their hearts? The things of this Earth. The last thing they ask the bodily presence of the risen Lord is this: Hey Jesus, when are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel? Their hearts were still concerned with Earthly kingdoms, not heavenly ones. It would take the Holy Spirit to change their hearts. It is then that Jesus ascends. The disciples watched him for a while but, eventually, they looked up, and they couldn't see Jesus. Staring into the sky, they continued to be focused on Earthly concerns, waiting for the physical. It was then that two men dressed in white appear asking: **Men** of Galilee, why are you looking for Jesus in the wrong place? Does that sound familiar? It should because at the beginning of this same chapter, Luke tells us that the women at the tomb on Easter Sunday met two men in dazzling garments asking "Why do you seek the living one among the dead?" In other words: **Women** of Galilee, why are you looking for Jesus in the wrong place? In St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we hear an echo of this as he prays that the Spirit of wisdom and revelation bring to them knowledge of Jesus so that their **hearts** may be enlightened.

This problem of "where Jesus is" remains an issue for Christians to this day. The issue is not in a misplaced crucifix in a church. No, the issue goes deeper than that. As Christians, we are called to **see** Christ in **others** AND we are called to **be** Christ **to** others. The question is, how can we do either of these if we have lost sight of Jesus, if Jesus is not already living in our hearts? This question weighed heavily on me in these last few weeks. Having lost Pope Francis, we prayed that the Holy Spirit would guide the conclave in the selection of the next successor of Peter. Personally, all day at work, on a screen in the background, waiting for the white smoke to

appear, I kept an eye on the seagull cam, uh, chimney cam. Suddenly, white smoke appeared and I felt like a kid at Christmas waiting to see what God had given us. As Pope Leo was announced and walked onto the loggia, my phone began to blow up with excited texts. Texts that said: He's an American! He's an Augustinian! He's from Chicago! He's a Cubs fan! (Turns out that he is a White Sox fan meaning he needs our prayers even more.) But, within a few minutes, other texts began to arrive. Texts that were not so joyful. They fell into two distinct categories: some saying that Pope Leo will be **too much** like Pope Francis and some saying that Pope Leo would be **too little** like Pope Francis. This division fell neatly into American political categories. It seemed that too many decided "I don't like him! Now, let me find the reason." The emotional tears of Pope Leo had barely dried and some were already passing negative judgement on him.

Now, my point is not really about Pope Leo and people's opinion of him. No, the point is that his selection and our immediate reactions seem to have exposed our hearts without us realizing it. I will tell you that these are the hearts of good, loving, charitable Catholics but in that moment my question is, if they looked into their hearts, would they see Jesus? "Was Jesus in their hearts?" Was there love? Was there joy? Was there Christian charity? Was Jesus in their hearts? The men in white told the disciples "This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven." When we look up into Heaven are we truly waiting for Jesus to descend from the clouds? Or, in these politicized times, would we be happy with a donkey? Or with an elephant? Is Jesus in your heart? Do you look at politics and the world through a Christian lens? Or do you look at Christianity through a political lens? Is Jesus in your heart? Sports, music, movies, books, so many things in our life *including* religion, they all seem to be defined for us in political terms. Unlike the Gospel which challenges us, political tribalism can be comforting because we instinctively know how approach

the world, we know what we are to think about things, and we are part of a group. It is us versus them. --- It is **us versus them**, even though we know that our faith tells us, time and again, that it is us **with** them. If you stopped and took a look, is Jesus in your heart?

As we approach the end of the Easter Season, we have a chance to look back on what brought us here. With Ash Wednesday, we began our Lenten journey being told: “Repent, and believe in the Gospel.” We prepared ourselves to experience the Paschal mystery so that we may rejoice with the resurrected Christ during the Easter season. This season ends next week with Pentecost and the descent of the Holy Spirit. But, on this day, when we concentrate on the Ascent of Jesus, we see that there still is time to change. Like the disciples whose hearts were still focused on Earthly things but were later renewed, there is time for us to open our hearts to receive God’s infinite love and mercy, to let Jesus into our hearts. We can **choose** to reject division and embrace what our Christian faith calls us to do: to hold one another together with the love of Jesus. Beloved in Christ, we must always be Christians first. We all can do this and do this we must, if we are ever to rejoice in his triumphant return. Until then, if someone asks you where Jesus is, you can honestly look in your heart and respond: “There he is.” (Pointing to your heart.) “Right there.”

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