Today we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension. The danger of a feast like the Ascension is precisely this – that with Christ’s ascension into heaven we may think of God being up there, unconnected to the world here below. After all, didn’t the disciples stand there looking into the sky? (Act 1:11) Especially as we experience pandemic, it is easy to be overwhelmed by anxiety and grief and lose sight of Christ in our midst.

I would like to discuss this in three points.

1. First, the ascension of Jesus reveals our destiny. I am not sure about you, but these days I have been confronted with the basic existential questions. In many ways, these questions arise from my conversations with my mother is nine thousand miles away. She is very anxious about my well-being. She is concerned that I am alone. She is also very concerned that as I go about my priestly ministry, that I might myself become a victim of the virus. But there is one thing that she is sure of – that her life and mine are in God’s hands. She prays, she intercedes, she cries – but all in the absolute faith and assurance that the life of every human person is in God’s hands. I am not free of anxiety myself. I have been at funerals, baptisms, and with the dying. And now that churches are open for public worship, I am concerned about our staff, our parishioners, and myself. What if one of us becomes a victim of COVID-19? It is in these moments that the ascension of Jesus becomes a comfort and consolation. As my mother reminds me these days, “Be very careful, but remember that our lives are in God’s hands.” Today, more than ever, I am reminded that my destiny is in God’s hands. With our destiny secure, today, this hour, this moment, we must live to the glory of God. Today, this hour, this moment, we must be disciples. What does this have to do with the ascension of Jesus. It is the ascension of Jesus that reminds us that our lives are in God’s hand. It is the ascension of Jesus that reveals our destiny. It is this destiny that gives us the strength to live the present with courage. So, we live cautiously but courageously. We live carefully but lovingly. We live prudently but generously. For Christ is our destiny.
2. Second, ascension gives us hope. Let me read for you the prayer that St. Paul makes for the Ephesians in today’s second reading. “May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call….” (Eph 5:17-18). St. Paul is praying for two things for the Ephesians: the knowledge of God and the HOPE that comes from the knowledge of God. Is it not true that God sent us Jesus to bring hope? He lifted humanity from the depths of hopelessness. The feast of the ascension is the culmination of the hope that Christ brought to humanity. Today we live in the hope that where he has gone, we too will follow. Even as we battle this pandemic, none of us has to live without hope. If we understand the ascension of Jesus, then we know hope.
3. Third, ascension gives us a new dignity. The scene at the end of today’s gospel reading is rather amusing. Jesus has slowly disappeared into the sky. The disciples are standing there… gaping. The angels come and tell them, “Why are you standing there looking at the sky? (Acts 1:11) The disciples are not meant to be like aimless people, gaping into the sky anymore. Thus far the disciples were learners – weak, groping, uncertain. That changed with the ascension. Jesus gave them a new dignity and purpose, “You are witnesses to these things,” he said to them. Now they must be to others what Jesus was to them. We are in the midst of a pandemic. In this time of crisis, our dignity lies in being “witnesses to these things.” And we bear witness by living cautiously but courageously, carefully but lovingly, prudently by generously. We bear witness by always imparting the hope that is Jesus Christ. We bear witness by now being for others who Christ has been for us. Let us live out our new-found dignity by bearing “witness to these things!”

Even though, Christ has ascended, he leaves his spirit with us. He leaves his presence in his Body and Blood. He says to us in today’s gospel, “Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” Strengthened by his presence, let us live in hope, bearing witnessed to these things.

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