

Text: Acts 1:1-11  
The Ascension of the Lord, Year B  
13 May 2018  
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This week at Confirmation class, all the youth were talking about “Heavenly Bodies”. In talking about “Heavenly Bodies” they weren’t talking about the planets. They were talking about the biggest fashion event of the year, the Fashion Gala last Monday at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York that kicked off a fashion exhibition called “Heavenly Bodies” because it is a fashion exhibition of Catholic robes and vestments, some of them loaned from the Vatican. And the reason everyone in class was talking about the “Heavenly Bodies” Gala was because the singer Rhianna showed up wearing a mitre – the pointed hat bishops wear – personally loaned to her for the evening by none other than Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, my pick for pope at the next election: Cardinal Dolan, not Rhianna.

So we spent part of Wednesday evening hearing about the Gala “Heavenly Bodies” and it’s perfect timing for today’s feast, because “Heavenly Bodies” is the promise of the Ascension of the Lord for us, that one day we too will have heavenly bodies.

When the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, concludes his visit among us on earth, the Son of God returns to his existence in heaven: what we call his Ascension, going back up to his throne, returning to the seat of power at the center of the universe, ‘seated at the right hand of the Father’ as we say in the Creed. But the Son of God has been changed by his time on earth. To live among us as one of us, the Son of God was born of a woman, joined with the human Jesus at the moment of conception. The Son of God and the human Jesus are intimately joined to become one person. So when the Son of God returns to heaven, the Son of God brings the man Jesus with him – because God and humanity have been joined in Jesus of Nazareth. With the Ascension, there is a change in the Trinity – a human being, the man Jesus, is now at the heart of the divine Trinity. The Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – *allows* itself to be changed by welcoming human nature into its existence, the divine Son and the man Jesus joined in the Trinity for eternity.

And that is where the promise of “Heavenly Bodies” for us comes into the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord. Because just as in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead all men and

women receive the promise of resurrection, so in the Ascension of the transformed man Jesus into heaven all men and women receive the promise that we will have heavenly transformation – heavenly bodies. In the Collect, the Opening Prayer of Mass, we told God the Father that “the Ascension of Christ your Son is our exaltation, and, where [Jesus Christ] the Head has gone before [us] in glory, [we] the Body is called to follow in hope.” And at the end of Mass, we will ask God that this hope of our future glorification will “draw us onward to where our nature” is united with God now – in the Son of God become human, and come back home to the heart of the Trinity on the Feast of the Ascension, which is our homecoming too, the coming home of humanity back to God to receive our “heavenly bodies”.

Unlike our Confirmation students who filled me in on something *everyone* was talking about when they told me about the Gala “Heavenly Bodies”, I know I spend my life talking about things few people think or talk about – but that’s my role. And, in that vein, I’ll point out that there are two different stories of the Ascension in the Bible. In our worship we use St Luke’s timetable, which says that 40 days after he is raised from the dead, the Lord Jesus ascends to heaven, and 10 days later on Pentecost, the Father and the Son send down the Holy Spirit on believers. In St John’s Gospel, everything takes place on Easter Day: Jesus is raised from the dead, ascends into heaven, and sends out the Holy Spirit all on the same day, Easter Day. I prefer John’s version, because it tightly connects our resurrection, our glorification, and our living life in the power of the Spirit as really 3 parts of one event. But I also like St Luke’s version, the one we read on today’s feast, because we – having received the promise of our resurrection in the resurrection of Jesus and having received the promise of glorification in the ascension of Jesus – we now have work to do on earth to continue what Jesus was doing until he returns. As we heard today, while the disciples of Jesus are staring up in the sky watching Jesus go, two angels appear and ask the disciples an uncomfortable question. “Men of Galilee,” the angels ask, “*why* are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus will return...” Which boils down to the angels telling us, “Don’t stand around. Get busy!”