

Today is the 7th Sunday of Easter, but this Sunday is different from the rest of Eastertide because Jesus has already ascended. Pentecost is not until next week, that is when our fears are overcome by the spirit. But this week, we are unsure, a little timid. It is good to reflect on our situation and why we still consider it Easter.

I think this Sunday is a little bit like the story of Mary and Martha at Bethany. You remember the two sisters who entertained Jesus? Martha was busy in the kitchen and Mary sat at the feet of Jesus to listen to his teaching, Mary was deemed to have chosen the better part. We in a sense have been like Mary for these past few weeks, we sit at the feet of the risen Lord and absorb his teaching. It is a pleasant space to be in. We sit comfortably at the feet of Jesus, with not a care, or responsibility in the world.

But now the time of Mary is over, Jesus has ascended and turned the teaching and the witness over to us. We could think of this as Martha's time. But we must beware of the pitfalls of this time:

Jesus has indeed left us, but not abandoned us. Abandonment is vicious, it leaves people devastated and alone. But Jesus has equipped us in two ways to deal with his absence. First we have had the benefits of his teaching. All of the Mary time we have spent listening at the feet of Jesus

will now pay off, we can use what we learned as we encounter people, to understand and to love as Jesus would have it.

But far more importantly we have the example of the person of Jesus himself. Jesus faced his abandonment and betrayal, not with vindictiveness, not with blame, but with a weapon far more powerful: hope. In the face of death, after crucifixion on a cross, Jesus rose from the dead, once and for all. He answered death with life, despair with hope, and abandonment with companionship. How can we but follow in this example?

The gospel we are called to preach is nuanced by the world we live in. Today, we see a world of violence around us, where one group practices terrorism, and others respond with bombs, where we mock and alienate each other, and those mocked respond with shots fired in a school. Where litigation has become a part of the healing process for many who see themselves as victims. A world where we hold ourselves aloof from others, and then wonder why we are lonely. What a radical challenge we have before us, to preach the gospel in this world. To preach with the peace of our lives and hearts, in the face of the violence around us. To preach with the hope of our perseverance when we are victimized. To preach unity when we are lonely. To preach with the faith of our commitment to Christ, in a

world that changes so much, that nothing seems sure. This is the challenge of this week. We are not abandoned at the Ascension; we are set free!

Now we gather at the table of the Lord. Jesus, who was broken, made others whole. Jesus, who was killed, rose to new life. Jesus, our teacher our companion, now sets us free. We nourish ourselves here, we strengthen ourselves with each other's presence. And we live lives of hope in the face of despair. This is our Eucharist, and this is our Faith. Alleluia!