

Acts 1:1-11

Psalm 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9.

Eph 1:17-23

Mk 16:15-20

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Walking down Via Conciliazione in Rome toward the Basilica of St. Peter can be hazardous to one's health. As one approaches the Piazza from blocks away, one's eyes are drawn upwards to the immensity and the beauty of the Basilica. As the grand Basilica rises from the Piazza, one cannot help but look up to the cupola and the Cross on the top of the golden ball that adorns its very top. As one continues to walk along the islands on either side of the street toward the Piazza, if one does not eventually look down, the danger factor increases greatly. You see, the island eventually ends at the completion of each block and the person with eyes fixed on the beautiful scene above needs to step down a few steps into the street in order to cross over to the other side. If one does not eventually look down to see not only where one is going but also how one is getting there, there is sure to be a scraped knee, a bruised elbow or even worse a broken wrist or nose. It is a rude awakening for those who cannot escape the temptation to fix one's gaze on the beauty above. Surely the street below one's feet is nowhere near as beautiful as what draws one's eyes heavenward, but experience, which sometimes brings pain, has a way of teaching some important lessons in life.

It would be nice if the two men dressed in white who made their appearance to the disciples in today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles would also appear to us during those times when we have our gaze locked on what is above. Their question to the disciples is a question from which all of us could benefit. "Why are you standing there looking at the sky?" It was a question which brought the disciples back to earth after witnessing the Lord's Ascension. Naturally they were amazed at what had just occurred, naturally their eyes were fixed on what was above, on the beauty of what had just taken place, and naturally they would have stayed like that for a long while unless something, or someone, called them back to their earthly existence. Having their eyes fixed on the beauty of the Ascension was a good thing, it was a sign of God's glory among them. It was a sign reminding them of the reward of heaven awaiting all of them. However, they could not remain staring up forever. The message that they received reminded them of where they were and the lives that they needed to continue living... here on earth. Even if it is not as beautiful as what their eyes were seeing.

That is a reality and a reminder for each of us. Not only for those who risk the chance of falling off a curb while looking at the beautiful Basilicas of Rome, but for all of us throughout the world. The streets below our feet are calling us, just as those two men dressed in white called out to the disciples. The streets call out to us, "Why are you standing there looking at the sky?"..... "We are down here" they say....."we are down at your feet!"... "You need to notice us too or you are going to stumble on the way." "Even

if we are not as beautiful as what is above”, they say, “you must look down and notice us.”

There are people who belong to those voices in those streets, they are the poor, the marginalized, the suffering, the sick, the people who live in war-torn parts of the world. They are people living in AIDS infected regions and countries of our world, they are those people recovering from natural disasters, those who are mourning the death of loved ones or of families that are breaking apart. There are countless voices calling out to each and every one of us to look down, to notice, and to see what is going on around us as we make our way to the beauty of our heavenly home.

Today’s feast naturally draws our attention to what is above; the very act of ascending draws us upwardly. Thanks be to God we have our readings and our celebration today to bring us back to earth. As we celebrate this feast of Christ, who, as the letter to the Ephesians reminds us, “has all things beneath his feet,” let us give thanks to Christ for the example he gave us to look down and to notice who we are and where we are....not only where we are going. For we all share our post beneath Christ’s feet. The next time we find ourselves with eyes fixed on the heavens, whether it is the beauty of a Basilica, the clouds in the sky, or the majesty of a mountain, hopefully we will be reminded that we cannot continue like that forever, but must also look at the world around us and the people with whom we share it. For we all have been placed and live together beneath the feet of Christ Jesus, whose ascension into heaven we celebrate today.