

Acts 1:1–11
 Psalm 47:2–3, 6–9
 Ephesians 1:17–23
 Luke 24:46–53

Ascension's Goal directs our purpose.

The Stanley Cup Playoffs! I will admit it. I am a true Canadian sports fan and never tire of watching the skilled players of the NHL compete for what I think is the most beautiful trophy in all of professional sport, the Stanley Cup. What makes hockey at this time of the year so exciting is that with the first round of the playoffs there are sixteen teams that have a common goal, to win Lord Stanley's trophy, and they have a common purpose, to play intentionally every game in all three zones, defence, neutral and offence. That team which has played three zone hockey most effectively will then hoist the thirty plus pound trophy when the final buzzer sounds because the victorious team has won 16 games in four rounds of the playoffs. While they will be bruised and tattered the winning team will be exuberant as well because of what they have gained.

I want to suggest to you that the Ascension of our Lord is to our Catholic Faith what the playoffs are to hockey. Because of the Ascension of Jesus we have clarified for us our common goal and we have defined more clearly our common purpose.

Our Common Goal is that we will come to share fully in the divinity of Christ because he chose to humble himself and so share in our humanity. It is this wonderful truth that the priest affirms at every Mass with the mingling of the wine and water. As the water is added, he prays quietly:

By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.

St. Irenaeus said something similar in the second century. He put it like this:

“Jesus took on our humanity in order to give us His divinity”.

The common goal we will one day share is the fullness of heaven. We will in the end, which in turn will be our eternal beginning, be Saints. Of this wonderful fact St Paul writes in Ephesians when he prays these words for those who first received the letter and those of us listening two millennia later:

17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

The Ascension of the Lord announces to us that we have a solid and lasting hope, the glorious inheritance in the saints, heaven itself, which is our common goal. St Leo the Great, who was Pope from 440-461, in speaking about the Ascension of Jesus and what it means for us commented:

Today we are not only made possessors of Paradise but with Christ we have ascended, mystically but also really, to the highest Heavens and have won through Christ a grace more wonderful than the one we had lost.

For the Apostles, as Luke tells us the realization of what the ascension meant filled them with great joy. A joy that was like, well winning the Stanley Cup. The Ascension strengthens and nourishes our hope of attaining Heaven. It invites us always to lift up our heart, as the preface of the Mass says, and seek the things that are above. Our hope is very great because Christ himself has gone to prepare a dwelling place for us.

But notice this; with our goal in mind because the eyes of our heart have been enlightened to be a hope-filled people, we are given focus so that in the present we can live out our common purpose. You will notice in the passage from Acts the angels admonish the disciples.

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Here is the point; the Church is not to spend her time heaven gazing. Rather, knowing our goal, which is heaven, our gaze, as the Church is to look outwards to the world. Such a focus will give us the common goal so clearly articulated in both the Acts of the Apostles and The Gospel. Both were from the hand of one author, St. Luke.

Here is our common goal according to the Acts of the Apostles. Quoting Jesus, St Luke writes:

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.”

Then in the Gospel, our common goal is given even greater clarity when Jesus says to the Apostles:

Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

The Common Goal of the Church is to witness to Jesus as we proclaim to all nations the invitation to turn to Christ and so come to know the infinite mercy of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

St. Peter's is a community that has a clear understanding of our common goal and so our common purpose is clearly being embodied in our corporate life. May we be inspired by the Feast of the Ascension of become ever more committed to this common purpose to bring Jesus to those who are without hope and without God.

As we think of those players who have were selected to be on the Bruins and Blues, the GM and scouts spent much time and money in creating these championship teams. Here at St. Peter's we too have spent much money and time to create an environment that is welcoming so that when we gather for Mass and in other areas of our corporate life the words of today's Collect will ring true:

Gladden us with holy joys, almighty God, and make us rejoice with devout thanksgiving, for the Ascension of Christ your Son is our exultation, and, where the head has gone before in glory, the Body is called to follow in hope.

Because our goal is to follow Jesus to where he has gone before in glory we are to cultivate a community that is Jesus' body still present in the world. As we have a clearer purpose we will shape within our corporate life an environment where thankfulness, joy and hope will ever more mark our lives.

People say to me all the time how positive and encouraging a community they experience at St. Peter's. I believe this is because we are mission minded. Like a good hockey team we know our goal and are clearly defining our purpose.

Thank you for being part of making St. Peter's a team that is a joy to coach as together with heaven before us we are choosing to make a difference here in Calgary's North West.