

*Ascension's Goal directs our purpose.*

Homily for May 28<sup>th</sup> -29<sup>th</sup> 2022

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. Alas, like many Calgarians I was hopeful the Flaming C might have a Victory Parade through the downtown – that is until that skilled number 97 from that other Albertan city sent the home team to clean out their lockers after elimination on Thursday evening.

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.

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.

What is remarkable about the reading from Acts is the interaction between Jesus and the apostles that so clearly states the Church's purpose. The Apostles now know that Jesus is the King who has come to establish the Kingdom of God and so they ask him: Jesus are you now going to restore the Kingdom to Israel? This is what they have been praying for, he is the Promised one who would establish a Kingdom that would never end and that through this Kingdom God would bless the world.

They ask the 25,000 Question, so Jesus are you going to restore the Kingdom to Israel and listen to his answer:

Here is our common purpose 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.”***

So here is the point. The Apostles were expecting that Jesus was going to restore the Kingdom and he turns to them and says, I am not doing it alone boys. I will restore the Kingdom yes, but through you!

Notice Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will come upon them in power. This word in Greek is dynamis from where we get the word dynamite. This is the kind of power Jesus promises to the Church. But note this, the power is joined to the word “witnesses” which in Greek is the word martyr. So here is the remarkable thing: As the Church is willing to witness to Jesus even through martyrdom the Kingdom of Jesus will have the power to spread around the world.

The Common purpose 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. But this is not in our own strength but in a weakness that is so dependent on the Holy Spirit that we are willing to suffer for Jesus that that the explosion of grace can affect the world for good.

The Collect for today’s Mass expresses clearly how our goal inspires our purpose when we prayed:

***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’ hope-filled body still present in the world. As we have a clearer understanding of our goal, we will have a common purpose shaped within our corporate life marked by thankfulness, joy and hope.

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 learning to be 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 as we are witnesses to the Power of God that dynamite that alone can restore the Kingdom of which Jesus is the eternal king.