

7th Sunday of Easter, Year "A"

The Ascension of the Lord

"The year was 1923, and Genia was 13. Genia's father had just died. In 1923, if someone had an obstruction of the bowels, they would have to wait until morning for surgery. Genia's father didn't make it until morning, and died at the age of 39.

Having come from Poland just 10 years before, Josef had worked for his family because that was his responsibility. Josef's wife, a widow at age 35, and his children, Genia 13, Helena 8 (my mom), James 7, Stashu 5 and Casmier, 15, who was in a wheelchair for 10 years after being hit by a car, all had to "go on".

The responsibility was then in the hands of Josefina, the 35-year-old widow, as well as in the hands of Genia, the 13 year old girl.

In 1923, there was no welfare. What was the family to do? Genia, forced to learn responsibility, went to work cleaning houses to help the family. Tending the garden and canning the food, tending the cow and selling the milk, Genia learned responsibility.

This "learned" responsibility was carried on when her brother, Casmier died in 1931 and her mother, Josefina died in 1932. Genia took her brothers and sister, Helena (my mom) and raised them.

From that Christmas Eve in 1932, Genia never gave up the responsibility, until all the children were raised to adulthood and even after that until the day Ciocia Genia died at the age of 79. Praying the rosary and attending Mass everyday for her family was her "learned" responsibility.

This "learned" responsibility that Ciocia Genia, my Auntie Genia, had to learn in 1923 and later in 1932, and until the day she passed on to heaven, made me "value" family responsibility! I would like to think that Ciocia Genia, my "hero" and my "angel" is watching over the

family and saying "family first", that's your responsibility and you better learn it and carry it on! (By Judy).

Like Genia, the Ascension Day marks the day the apostles assumed the responsibility of carrying on the work of Jesus in the world. Before ascending into heaven, Jesus says to the apostles "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" – Matthew 28:18-20.

Today is a day of spiritual empowerment. Jesus ascends into heaven to mark the completion of his earthly project and to hand over the baton (as in a relay race) to the apostles who will eventually hand it over to people of goodwill everywhere who are working hard to build the kingdom of God on earth.

At the beginning the apostles were confused and lost as to what Jesus means by leaving them and going back to His Father. The entire picture was not clear to anyone yet, but the angels said to them "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven" – Acts 1:10-11.

Assuming responsibility is not an easy project. We usually approach responsibilities with lots of trepidation, suspense and worry. The fear of the unknown and the possibility of failure are the constituent elements in every responsibility that we undertake in life, yet, we do know that if we muster the courage to take the leap of faith and delve into the unknown, even if we did not emerge as victorious as we would like, we do come out of it fulfilled or become better human beings.

The world of the apostles remains as complicated as our world today; hence, the same project that Jesus entrusted to the apostles

remains our project today, namely building up the kingdom of God on earth.

Someone may ask what that entails. The kingdom of God is not a project in the sky or on the mountain. The kingdom of God exists wherever people live in peace.

The kingdom of God is all about the reign of love, justice and respect for all sentient beings. These are the greatest desires of the human heart. Working for the reign of peace on earth demands that we are guided by the Holy Spirit. Jesus assures us that He will not leave us orphans and that He will send the Holy Spirit to be with us, to guide us and to lead us to the truth - Jn 14:15-21.

As we prayerfully observe this day – the Ascension Day, the church invites us to continue to pray for the anointing of the Holy Spirit. This is the same Spirit that guided Jesus to a successful ministry on earth and it is the same Spirit that will guide all believers to the kingdom where we shall be privileged to call God “Abba” – Father.

Whenever we anchor our lives to Jesus, nothing is impossible but without Jesus in our lives, we become empty, restless and forlorn.

Next Sunday is Pentecost Sunday when we celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples of Jesus empowering them to preach the good news of salvation throughout the whole world. It will be a wonderful coincidence should it be the Sunday when our churches will be open again for public worship after the Covid-19 lockdown.

As we prepare to return to our public worship as a community of faith, let us take advantage of this lockdown period to intensify our prayer life. Let us open our hearts to the anointing of the Holy Spirit so that we may be courageous enough to embrace once again the eternal project of building the kingdom of God (the civilization of love).

It is by so doing that we keep hope alive, recognizing that even now the work of re-creation and regeneration continues with us, in us and through us as we work together for a better world. This project is as essential as it is inevitable. No one should be left behind and no one should sit down to let others do the work because the kingdom of God shall never come to pass until each and every one of us contributes to its realization.