

# The Ascension - where do we go now?

## A Gospel Reflection from Brian Wigger

A friend of mine, who is a survivor from sex abuse and is somewhat bitter and cynical about the church, recently remarked with regard to the Papal Conclave and the election of Pope Leo XIV: "What the institutional church is trying to do is to put the best face on the fact that it's dying.

It's trying to manage a death.

I thought, what an interesting expression, "*to manage a death!*" What she is suggesting, I think, is the church, like a person adjusting to a terminal disease, is trying to reshape its imagination to accommodate itself to the unthinkable, its own dying.

She is right, I believe, in saying that the church today is trying to reshape its imagination. The late Pope Francis made this obvious. She is wrong about what it is trying to manage. I believe that the church is trying to manage today is not a death, but an ascension. What perhaps needs reshaping in our imagination is the same thing that needed to be reshaped in the imagination of the first disciples in the forty days that stretched from the resurrection to the ascension. We need to understand again how to let go of one body of Christ so that it can ascend and let Pentecost happen.

Perhaps the church is in that in between time of the resurrection and ascension, feeling mostly despondent. As we continue to work through the process of *Beacons of Light* and are now a part of a bigger family called, Riverview Catholics, we are trying to manage an ascension, not a death of our parish. I can easily see where my friend can be confused because every ascension presupposes a death and a birth can sometimes look like a death. The church we grew up in, that body of Christ has been crucified, but Christ is not dead, the church is not dead.

The Christ we once knew has been crucified and we cannot yet recognize that He is alive, more alive than before, and walking with us, in a new way. Hence, as on the road to Emmaus, we also frequently walk with faces downcast, in faith despair, needing Christ to appear in a new guise to reshape our imaginations so that we can recognize Him as He is now present to us.

And so, might it be for us that, to have faith in today's world is to be in that time between the death of Christ and the ascension, vacillating between joy and despondency, trying to manage an ascension.

On the road of faith, there's always bad news and good news. The bad news is that invariably our understanding of Christ gets crucified. The good news is that Christ is always very much alive, present to us still, and in a deeper way. Personally, one can not help to see how the Parish of St. Stephen lives out the ascension experience humbly and with integrity.