

**Homily for May 8, 2005
The Ascension of the Lord**

By Father Charles Bowes

Acts 1:1-11

Psalm 47:2-3; 6-9

Ephesians 1:17-23

Matthew 28:16-20

The Lord is as close as our own hearts.

Did you know that there is a rock just outside Jerusalem that is supposedly the place of the ascension?

Catherine de Hueck Doherty, a candidate for sainthood, tells of visiting the spot when she was a child. Her father was the Russian ambassador to Egypt. While they lived there, they visited the Holy Land. In her autobiography, Catherine writes: "One day my parents took me to the Rock of the Ascension, the place near Jerusalem from which Christ rose into heaven. I loved to look at that rock because it showed the imprints of a person who was standing on his toes on one foot, while the other was flat. I had one ambition: to put my feet into these imprints of the feet of Christ. But that was a bit difficult, because they had this area cordoned off. But what's a rope to a little girl? One day I just slid underneath while everybody was praying, and put my little feet into those imprints, one up and the other down."

"People began screaming, 'Look what she's doing! Look what she's doing! Get that child out of there! Blasphemy, blasphemy!' A Russian priest came out and said, 'Let the little children come to me, have you forgotten that?' He helped me put my feet in the imprints of the feet of Jesus Christ, and then he escorted me out of there!"

What a wonderful experience little Catherine had – to put her feet into the very footprints of Jesus. But that's what we are all called to do, to walk in the footsteps of Jesus just as his disciples did while he was here on earth.

What is today's feast all about, anyway? Is it a nostalgic day when we gather to share memories of a loved one who has left us? In actuality, Jesus, our loved one, is closer to us because of his ascension.

As one theologian puts it, "The Ascension of Christ is his liberation from all restrictions of time and space. It does not represent his removal from earth, but his constant presence everywhere on earth."

Another way to say the same thing is that Jesus grows no older, but is forever caught in his powerful passage through death to life. We meet that ageless, power-filled Lord most intensely at every Eucharist, but also whenever we turn to Jesus in prayer. Jesus has promised, "I am with you always, until the end of the age."

We are like those disciples centuries ago who heard the great commission – to go and make disciples, to baptize and to teach, to be Jesus in our world. We, too, stand in bewilderment and doubt. How can we, with all our faults and weaknesses, possibly carry out this great commission? Where do we start? What do we do? How can we implement this in our lives?

The child, Catherine de Hueck Doherty, had the answer when she put her feet into Jesus' footprints. We are to do as she did – not so literally as at the Rock of the Ascension, but by the way we live – by what we say and do and believe. In such a way go forth to proclaim the good news, to be Jesus on this earth. We, who are his body, make him known, carry his good news to every part of the universe. We are the hands and feet, the eyes and ears and the very heart and mind of Jesus Christ throughout the earth. That's something to celebrate here and at every Eucharist.

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our own hearts.