

**Ascension (C)  
May 20, 2007  
By Father Charles Bowes**

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

## *Here comes Jesus in the person of you and me.*

The Ascension is the feast wherein Jesus gets out of the way so the Spirit can dwell within us, the Spirit of his dying and rising.

"Unless I go, the Spirit will not come to you, but if I go, the Spirit will come and dwell within you," says Jesus in John chapter 16. My brother once remarked, on being told of the nearness, the indwelling of God, that now he wouldn't have to shout when he prayed.

Well, we know the rest of the story. It's called "the church" the people wherein Jesus' Spirit lives, the Spirit of his dying and rising. That makes God as close, as near, as next to us as our own hearts. We think of God as distant, when in fact God is as intimate to us as our next breath or heartbeat. No, the church is not just a building, although we call it a building, a church, a synagogue or mosque. The church is primarily a people.

I learned this as a teenager when I would drop off to a Gospel Holiness Church the cast-off food from the little grocery store across from my father's automobile garage. We had a truck, and I could make the drop after school. Each Monday, a group of senior citizens from the church gathered to prepare a dinner for the neighborhood children. Each Monday, over 100 children came to this place where birthdays could be celebrated, and manners taught, and empty stomachs

could leave feeling a little less empty.

I was just the runner, dropping off a box or two of food each week. It was an easy way to do a good deed while on the road to someplace else. Some weeks, there were boxes and boxes overflowing with good things: bread and potatoes and lettuce and bags of chips (just past the expiration date.)

Sometimes, there were dozens of dented cans of fruit, or ripe bananas (just beginning to turn.) Some weeks, usually right after a holiday, there were decorated cakes and fancy pies that never made it to a Valentine's party or a Memorial Day cookout. Those were the days when the ladies would swoop down on me, oohing and ahhhhing, laughing to think of all the birthdays they could celebrate in style.

One day, all that the store had to give them were dozens of hot dog buns, slightly stale and all a little squashed. I felt ashamed of what I was bringing, even tempted to stop and buy something else. After all, it was embarrassing to walk into that place of giving with nothing more than a few hot dog buns. Yet, when that box was unloaded, there was an awed silence, followed by shouts of "Praise Jesus!" and "The Lord is surely good!" They explained that someone donated hot dogs, drinks, chips and cookies. The only thing missing was the buns! "We've been sitting here all day, praying

for hot dog buns, and look!" they said.

Maybe, like me, you didn't grow up praying for hot dog buns. World peace or grace or forgiveness - those were acceptable subjects for prayer. Selfish people prayed for ponies, and noble people prayed for the sick to be healed. Those prayers were distant enough and generic enough to be safe.

But no one I knew ever prayed for hot dog buns. And maybe, like me, you never ever saw yourself as an agent of answered prayers - or at least, if you did, it would be for something big and dramatic - talking someone through a crisis, perhaps, or leading someone to faith...nothing as ordinary as delivering stale buns from the back of a quarter-ton pick-up.

But Jesus sends us out into the world - just as he was sent, as teachers, evangelists, pastors, even hot dog carriers - to continue his work. Jesus invites us to proclaim the Gospel to everyone, through our words, through our actions, through our willingness to be used - through our trust that he is always with us, within us, as close as our own hearts. Jesus invites us to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in Samaria, to the ends of the earth and just around the corner.

When Jesus ascended into Heaven, he left signs that would accompany those who believe. They would speak new languages; they would pick up serpents with their bare hands and not be hurt; they would lay hands on the sick, and the sick would recover. Those are some pretty big signs. Those signs would make an impression on even the biggest skeptic. But there are other signs, too, maybe not as big or as dramatic, but every bit as powerful.

For me, there were some grandparents who, every

Monday, knew how to pull hope out of a can of dented fruit. And there was a teenage boy who discovered he was an agent of the Kingdom by delivering a box of hot dog buns.

When Jesus ascended into Heaven, the disciples were looking intently at the sky. Suddenly, two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. They asked, "Why are you standing there looking at the sky?" Why indeed. If we keep looking in the sky for signs of Jesus, we might just miss the signs he really wants us to see. So let us pray: "You have swept us up in your grand design, loving one; help us trust your power in each thing we do or say. We ask this through Christ our Lord."

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