



Ascension of the Lord June 5, 2011 A

ASCENSION OF THE LORD TWO GREAT REFLECTIONS

The Ascension Day event completes Jesus' ministry here on earth. He returns to take his place in heaven with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The following two reflections for carrying on this feast day are by Jay Cormier. I am most grateful for the way Jay finds great stories to connect the readings with the Gospel of the day.

Carrying on the mission

In today's gospel, Jesus calls on his disciples and us to carry on his mission by following in his footsteps. Reflecting on this message, Jay Cormier has written a piece called *Margaret's Shoes*.

To be a practicing Catholic in 16th century England was dangerous. In the wake of Henry VIII's and Elizabeth I's insistence on being recognized as the sole head of the Church, Parliament enacted several severe anti-Catholic laws. The celebration of the "Roman" Mass was made illegal—priests were hunted down, arrested and executed. To shelter a priest, to teach the Catholic faith, to provide any aid or support to the outlaw religion were considered treason, punishable by death.

There are many stories of brave English Catholics who kept the faith alive in England and paid the ultimate price. First among the martyrs of England and Wales was St. Margaret Clitherow of Yorkshire. This valiant woman was hanged in 1586 at the age of 33 for harboring priests and having Mass in her home. Married to a Yorkshire butcher, Margaret also ran a small and illegal school for children in her home. She spent more than a decade in and out of prison—released once only long enough for the birth of one of her children.

Finally, in March of 1586, a raid on the Clitherow house revealed the existence of a priest's hiding place in the attic as well as chalices, missals and vestments. Margaret was arrested, imprisoned and formally

charged. She refused to consent to a trial: "Having made no offense, I need no trial," she said. The court had little choice in the matter but to find her guilty and sentence her to death.

From her prison cell the night before she died, Margaret made a final request: She left her shoes to her eldest daughter, Anne, who was then 12 years old. The message from mother to daughter was clear: Follow in my footsteps; the wordless gift said, carry on.

Today, Jesus leaves us his "shoes." He calls us to carry on his gospel of compassion, reconciliation and justice; he entrusts to us the work of resurrection. In Baptism, every Christian of every time and place takes on the role of witness to all that Jesus did and taught: We are witnesses not only in our articulating the powerful words of the Gospel but in the quiet, simple, but no-less powerful expression of compassion and love that echo the same compassion and love of God—God who is Father and Son and Brother and Sister to us all.

"What a mom. . ."

Brooke had been married for only a year when her life suddenly became a nightmare. The FBI burst into their house at 6AM and arrested Brooke and her husband on charges of fraud and conspiracy. Brooke would soon learn that her husband had used her identity to embezzle tens of thousands of dollars from his workplace. She had no idea.

In an instant, she lost her home and her marriage.

The federal charges were held against her for 90 days. So Brooke went home to her Mom and Dad's. For 90 nights, she slept on their couch—and for those 90 nights, Brooke's mom slept on the love seat, across from the couch. Brooke did not ask her mom to sleep there. She just did.

Brooke writes about the horrible experience and how her mother helped her through it in an essay in The New York Times (April 11, 2011).

Brooke's mom quietly shared every sleepless night, every meal that went uneaten, every moment of anger and grief and despair, with her daughter.

“Are you OK?” Mom would whisper during those long nights.

“Are you OK?” Brooke would whisper back.

“It was our code,” Brooke writes. “There was no real answer, but asking the question was enough.”

“To know that someone loved me so much, was willing to feel my pain so intensely . . . made me feel encased in a bubble of protection. I began to wonder if sadness was this finite thing, a big black mass of which there was only so much in the world. If so, my mother was sharing it with me so that I did not have to bear the full weight. The more she took, the more she was unable to eat and sleep, and the faster her heart raced, the less pain there was for me.”

Later, when the charges against her were dropped and she began to rebuild her life, Brooke shared the whole ugly story with her doctor.

“How have you survived this?” the doctor asked.

Brooke thought for a second. “While the charges were held against me, I slept on the couch in my parent’s house. I spent 90 nights on that couch.” Brook paused. “And my mom? She slept for 90 nights on the love seat.”

The doctor blinked, unable to hold back her tears. “What a mom,” she said softly, “what a mom.”

The Ascension of the Lord is not the marking of a departure but the realization of a presence. Matthew’s Gospel begins with the promise of Emmanuel—“God is with us”; it concludes with the promise of the Risen Christ: “I am with you always, even to the end of time.” It is not an abstract or distant presence—Christ is the center of our Church in Word, in sacrament, in every moment of generosity and every act of compassion we perform and experience. Christ’s constant presence in our midst is realized in every tear and sleepless night shared, every hurt healed, every offense forgiven. We realize Christ’s presence in the love and support of moms like Brooke’s—and we become that presence for others in the long, terrifying nights and picked-over meals we share with those who need us most.

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Location of new building project

Some of you may wonder if our plans for a new facility from the *Alive in Christ Campaign* are still alive. The answer is “YES”. We are planning on a 10,000-square foot building. Until this point, we assumed that the site of the new building would be the grassy area on the south side of our campus. But now good reasons are being put forward to construct a) *closer* to our water chiller system; b) the other major educational/meeting facilities; and our major handicap parking spaces. Most

likely the new building will now be located just west of the Parish Hall and Ministry Center where the old school portables used to be. Why this location?

- *Financial savings.* It is estimated that connecting the new facility to our energy-efficient water cooler system will save us about \$100,000 over the next ten years. Site work for connecting the new facility from the parking lot location would be \$75,000 less than connecting it to a structure located on the grassy area on the south end of the campus.
- *Permit and storm water area issue.* Building the new facility on the grassy area of campus would demand a permit, which could take 60-90 days and also require a new storm water retention system.
- *Kitchen facilities.* To save money, the new facility will not include a kitchen (only a food warmer), but the adjacent school kitchen will be easily accessible.
- *Improved safety.* The new site will be a more secure area, especially at night, for parishioners leaving the building.

The downside of the new location is that we will lose 28 parking spaces. We believe we can add more spaces on the north side of the campus and we should maximize use of the grassy area on the south side.

The new location will retain the same traffic flow for school pickup and the parking spots between the new building and sidewalk on the west side of the ministry center.

Our architectural firm is IO Engineers and AE Studio Architects & Associates. At this time, we think we may be able to begin construction between November 2011 and January 2012, which will take about 9-12 months to complete. The project will be funded from our *Alive in Christ* campaign. We will build within our means and will not borrow any money for this new facility.

Have a blessed week,

