

He felt, he said, the immense joy of being human, a member of a race in which God himself became incarnate. He longed to tell those people that "they are all walking around shining like the sun".

The monk was the famous Trappist, Thomas Merton, and today a plaque stands at the spot where he had his revelation. Usually such plaques commemorate a political or literary figure, or an historical event, but the one on that street corner in Louisville celebrates Merton's mystical moment.

Merton had an intense experience of God's presence and love. He saw the divine in that ordinary street on that ordinary day. He saw the image of God in the ordinary folk walking around him. It was as if they were shining like the sun.

FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISE

Today we celebrate the feast of the Ascension. Jesus has gone to his father in heaven, and the disciples feel his absence. They are alone again. We can only imagine what it must have been like for them, to experience the joy of the resurrection - having the risen Jesus back with them, different in form but real nonetheless - and then to experience his absence once more, when he leaves them to ascend to heaven. Even though he promises to send them the Holy Spirit, they might well have sung with Gilbert O'Sullivan: "Alone again, naturally."

The period between Ascension and Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit will come, is what is called the in-between times. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit will

descend on the disciples to strengthen them and fill them with a powerful sense of God's presence. But meanwhile they find themselves all alone.

It can feel the same for us. There are times when we feel as if God is not with us. Ours is a broken world, plagued by all kinds of suffering and injustice, violence and pain. None of us escapes the harsh reality of the human condition.

But the promise Jesus made to his disciples is true: God has not abandoned God's people. God is with us. God's Spirit is with us. The Second Vatican Council says that the church, and all the People of God, are imbued with the Holy Spirit. God's Holy Spirit shines in us.

That is what Thomas Merton saw that day on the Louisville street. He saw with extraordinary clarity that God's glory dwells in each person, God's Spirit sparkles in each person. No matter how old or young, or strong or frail, or agile or crippled, or large or small we are, we shine like the sun. No matter where we are from, or where we went to school, or what skin colour we possess, or what sexual orientation we have, or what our domestic situation may be, we shine like the sun. Because God has redeemed us, we shine like the sun.

We are in that in-between time awaiting Pentecost but we are already a redeemed people, who even in our human frailty, are shining like the sun. So shine today, shine like the resurrected son. Let all who encounter you see who you are - a redeemed person, in whom God's glory shines. And let each of us see each other for who we are - redeemed people, in whom God's glory shines. People who walk around shining like the sun. ■

series ends



Today's readings

Acts 1:1-11

Ephesians 4:1-13

Mark 16:15-20

For people of today, the ascension raises several obvious questions, such as where did Jesus go? If we say, following the texts of the Gospels, that Jesus is in heaven, what we really mean is that Jesus is in the presence of God. This, taken with the teaching about the Second Coming at the end of time, suggests that Jesus is absent as far as we are concerned.

If we take the wider Gospel tradition, we find that the ascension of Jesus is connected to the sending of the Holy Spirit and we are encouraged in the days between Ascension and Pentecost to pray for the renewal of the church by the Spirit. The disciples have been commissioned to spread the Gospel, but they do not have to rely on their own efforts alone. The Spirit will be the driving force behind their efforts. That they are succeeding will be shown by people being baptised, expressing outwardly that they have accepted inwardly the preaching of the Word and are willing to accept it. We may ourselves not be called to bear witness in such a direct manner, but as disciples of Jesus we are commissioned to bear witness to the faith into which we were once baptised and to which we assented once more at Easter.

GOD'S WORD TODAY

SoulSpace

SERIES: EASTER PEOPLE

Season colour: **WHITE**

In this series, **Gerard Moloney CSsR** explores the meaning of Easter and what it means to be an Easter people.

SHINE,
JESUS SHINE

As redeemed people, God's glory shines in each one of us. Sixty years ago, in March 1958, a monk was going about his business in a city in Kentucky in the US when suddenly he had a revelation, a mystical experience. He described it later: "In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the centre of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realisation that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers..."

