

## *The Ascension of the Lord*

**As Jesus ascended into heaven, the apostles looked on. Who wouldn't? They had witnessed his death and seen him risen. For 40 days he taught them. Then, "he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight." Today's first reading says three times that the apostles were "looking" as this happened. They looked on because it was dramatic. They looked on so they could testify to what they witnessed. But looking on surely prompted questions: "Is Jesus really gone? How can we live without him? What do we do now?"**

**Those same questions may afflict us whenever we stand alone with other humans looking on as it seems Jesus has disappeared from our sight. We experienced it two weeks ago when an 18-year old white man killed ten black people in a racist attack at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York. We felt it when a man opened fire on a Taiwanese congregation at a church in Laguna Woods, California. This week we again wondered at the disappearance of goodness when an 18-year old killed 19 schoolchildren and 2 teachers in Uvalde, Texas. Who wouldn't look on in shock, anger and despair? Like the apostles on that first Ascension Day, we probably wonder, "Is Jesus really gone? How can we live without him? What do we do now?"**

**Luke reminds the reader of Acts that his gospel explained "all that Jesus did and taught until the day he was taken up, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit" to the very people now looking on. At the end of this passage, two men suddenly appear, clad in the white garments that the bible frequently identifies as the uniform of those in heaven. These men challenge the apostles, "Why are you standing there looking at the sky?" They offer the reassuring words that Jesus will return, but the time to stand and look is now gone. Jesus had instructed them to stay in Jerusalem and await the promise of the Father: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth." The apostles were not helpless. They would receive power in the coming of the Holy Spirit.**

**We too are not helpless in the face of events that make it seem to those looking on that Jesus has disappeared. For many years, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has supported a number of measures to address the problem of gun violence. These include a total ban on assault weapons; measures that control the sale and use of firearms, such as universal background checks for all gun purchases; limitations on civilian access to high-capacity weapons and ammunition magazines; a federal law to criminalize gun trafficking; improved access to and increased resources for mental health care and earlier interventions; regulations and limitations on the purchasing of handguns; measures that make guns safer, such as locks that prevent children and anyone other than the owner from using the gun without permission and supervision; and an honest assessment of the toll of violent images and experiences that inundate people, particularly our youth.**

**Each of us can contact our legislators to support these strategies. We can also reject the videos, music, movies and entertainments that fill our eyes and ears with violence. We can do more than look on. We can look away from those who would seduce us into guns. We have the power of the Holy Spirit to do it.**