

Jesus owner but delegated responsibility to us

written by Bishop Anthony B. Taylor |

My grandfather founded a small meat packing business in Fort Worth (Taylor Dressed Beef) and worked at it very hard for many years.

He had to make many sacrifices in order to succeed, worked long hours, going in to work very early every morning, and at considerable financial risk — it was a very competitive environment. But as the business grew and he got older, he began to delegate authority to other employees he could trust, and one in particular was named Douglas.

As the business prospered, he began to take vacations with my grandmother, giving that employee even more authority. And by the time she had died and he had retired — eventually moving to Oklahoma — the business for which he had made so many sacrifices passed into the hand of a young protégé who was now the new owner. He had authority now.

That is sort of what Jesus did on today's feast of the Ascension. He began to establish the Kingdom of God first by his own hard work during his public ministry and, at the same time, began to train others, his disciples, to whom he gradually delegated more authority. And when they reached a point where they had sufficient ownership to begin to take over, he delegated to them — and to us — responsibility and authority for continuing the work that he has begun.

By his Ascension, he may have left us physically, but he remains present to us in the Spirit, which we will receive next Sunday on the great feast of Pentecost, and in our fellow believers, the body of Christ living and active in the world today.

That is exactly what has happened ever since. From one point of view, Jesus left us on the day of his Ascension into heaven, sort of like a businessman who retires and moves away.

In another sense, though, by delegating authority to the Church, he remains a living presence. In this sense, Jesus is very different from a retiree who sells the business and moves away. Such retirees do not remain present to the business they once owned, but Jesus can be.

Having ascended to heaven physically, he has left us all the responsibility of delegated authority, but he still remains the owner. In Matthew's account, we read: "Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." And then he adds an assurance that no human delegator of authority could give us: "Know that I am with you always, until the end of the world."

We see that Jesus delegates to us, the Church, shared responsibility for continuing to build the Kingdom of God in our own time, and he assures us that no matter what challenges we may face in proclaiming and living the Good News, we have Jesus' continued presence to sustain and guide us.

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In our Mass today we will be installing our seminarian Joshua Osborne in the formal ministry of lector and while he has long served as a reader at Mass, formal installation in this ministry is one of the steps leading to ordination to the diaconate and priesthood.

Our seminarians receive this ministry after their first year of theology, a couple of years prior to ordination to the diaconate. As an installed lector, Josh will have a more formal role in proclaiming this kerygma of Jesus's death and resurrection and, consequently, our share in his victory.

Josh, I encourage you and all our other seminarians to keep in mind that as you prepare to proclaim God's word to others, you also make sure to fully accept that word yourself, with all of its challenging implications, in obedience to the Holy Spirit. Meditate on it constantly, so that each day you will have a deeper love of the Scriptures, and in all you say and do, show forth to the world our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Bishop Anthony B. Taylor delivered this homily on Ascension, May 12.