

Sixth Sunday of Easter – Cycle C
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – May 26, 2019
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L. Frank Baum's classic children's book, "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz," has inspired any number of musical productions. The most famous, I suspect, is the 1939 movie starring Judy Garland, but it may have been eclipsed in this generation by "Wicked" which is still playing on Broadway at least 15 years after its premiere. I am old enough to remember "The Wiz," a 1975 re-imagination of the original story. I was in college in the late seventies so I saw a number of productions of "The Wiz." I distinctly remember the song, "Home," which was "The Wiz's" answer to "Somewhere over the Rainbow." The first lyric of "Home" grabs you immediately – "When I think of home, I think of a place where there's love overflowing." Yes, that song brings back memories of high school and college and, of course, memories of home. As most familiar songs do, it will stay in your head for a while. Home, the song reminds us, is not the house that we live in or the furniture and photographs that we surround ourselves with. Those things are frail and fragile. Home is something deeper. Home is familiar. Home is mom and dad and family. Home is, indeed, where there's love overflowing.

In our gospel today, Jesus tells his disciples that those who love him will be loved by the Father, will make their dwelling with the Father. What a pronouncement! What a promise! After all, Jesus is the incarnate Son of God. In the person of Jesus, God makes his dwelling with us – takes on human flesh, human frailty. We see each day how frail we truly are. We humans are hindered by injury and disease, hampered by weather and social ills. We humans are felled by death. Yet having conquered this human frailty, having conquered death, the risen Christ promises not just to make *his* dwelling with *us* – he promises that we will make our dwelling with the Father. In other words, Jesus promises us an eternal home with the God who loves us beyond measure. That's almost too much to imagine. We see a vision of that home – a vision of the new and eternal Jerusalem – in our second reading from the Book of Revelation. That home, St. John tells us, has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb of God. In our homes, we scramble for flashlights and candles when there's a power outage, we shelter ourselves in hallways or bathrooms when severe weather blocks our view of the sun or the moon. This new home, this eternal home, this dwelling with the Father sounds completely different from the fragile earthly dwellings we now call home. The heavenly Jerusalem won't be damaged by wind or swept away by water or

consumed by fire. Our eternal home needs no casualty insurance – the Lamb of God is all that we will ever need.

As appealing as this new home sounds, as anxious as we may be to dwell in eternal happiness with the Father – there's still one slight problem. We have to be willing to move; we have to be willing to love Jesus and to keep his word. Oh, sure, no problem – we tell ourselves. I can keep the word of the Lord, I'm willing to move – as long as I can bring along with me all of my belongings, all of my baggage, all of the stuff that I just can't part with. Every time I pack up and move to another parish I think to myself: I probably have one or two things I don't really need. As a matter of fact, I probably have hundreds of things I don't really need. But to get rid of stuff you have to be willing to look at it and sort through it and make a decision to throw it out. And that just seems to be too much work. And so I just let the unpacked boxes sit in the attic. All of us keep stuff around – physical stuff and emotional stuff – we grow comfortable with it. We tell ourselves that it makes us feel at home. In reality, of course, all of those belongings, all of that emotional baggage isolates us, keeps us from truly experiencing life. Those belongings, that baggage put barriers between us and God. We can't move to the Father's home if we're not ready to let go of all that we are holding on to.

Next weekend, we'll be celebrating the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord. We will celebrate the risen Christ's triumphal entry into heaven, his reunion with the Father. In the Ascension, our frail human nature now sits at the right hand of God. Christ becomes the first fruits of our salvation. He fulfills the promise we hear in today's readings. Think of all of the images of the Ascension that you have ever seen. Some have Jesus just sort of peacefully rising to heaven. Some have him entering the clouds. In some images, you can see only his feet. Think of those images and make a mental list of those in which Jesus is ascending carrying armloads of baggage, in which Jesus is followed by a moving van. You can't, of course. Jesus ascends to the Father – but he doesn't take his stuff with him. He's ready to return to his eternal home – fully human, fully divine, but unencumbered by the physical and emotional baggage that weighs us down. Are we ready to do the same? As we prepare to celebrate the Ascension, are we ready to let go of all that we are holding on to? Are we ready to move unencumbered into the Father's house? Are we ready to make our home with the Father? Home, the song tells us, is where there's love overflowing. Our God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is love. He offers us love overflowing. We have to ask ourselves – are we ready to accept? Are we ready to let go? Is God's love enough for us?