

**FATHER MARK SCHULTE**  
**HOMILY**  
**THE ASCENSION (A)**  
**MAY 17, 2026**

**“The Great Commission”**

Brothers and sisters, today we celebrate the feast of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven. According to the liturgical calendar Jesus ascended into heaven forty days after His resurrection on Easter Sunday. However, our Diocese as well as many others celebrate this feast on the following Sunday. Perhaps because it affords a greater number of our people the opportunity to participate in its recognition on a Sunday. But traditionally it has always been understood as Ascension Thursday.

After His resurrection from the tomb Jesus spent forty days appearing to His disciples encouraging and helping them come to faith in His resurrection. Jesus gave His apostles the glorious opportunity to witness His Ascension up into the heavens. But before He ascended He gave His Apostles specific instructions on how they were to carry on His mission. This is sometimes called the Great Commission. He said, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 26:16-20). And so their mission is a universal mission to all nations and peoples on earth, making salvation available to all peoples, not just to the Jews (CCC 849, 1122). They are given authority to give people new life through baptism, a power that only God can confer. And they were commissioned to teach people to observe all that Jesus commanded in the Gospel. This is the mission that Jesus has given to His Church. Only His Church has the God given authority to carry it out, as she does to this very day in our hearing (CCC 1444-1445).

Jesus said, “I will be with you always until the end of the age”. Jesus doesn’t specifically say what the end of the age is. Some of the Apostles ask Jesus if he will now restore the nation of Israel. They are still thinking from the perspective of an earthly kingdom (Acts 1:6). But elsewhere we know Jesus said that His kingdom “is not of this world” (Jn 18:36).

Even though Jesus will ascend into heaven out of their physical sight, He promises to remain with them always (CCC 788). He will remain with His Church in a number of ways. Through His Holy Spirit He will guide and teach the Church. He will maintain a mystical presence through the seven sacraments, especially the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. Thus Jesus is present in every Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and He is reserved in every tabernacle in the world (CCC 1183, 1379-1380).

Everyone needs spiritual encouragement. This is in large part what Jesus gave to His Apostles when He allowed them the opportunity to witness His triumphal Ascension into heaven.

Jesus' life on earth does not end in the defeat of death which the chief priests and Pharisees, and all His enemies were hoping for. But it ends instead in His victory over death and in His glorious Ascension into heaven.

Our Lord's Ascension into heaven serves to strengthen our hope that we will one day attain heaven too. Our prayer posture is one of "looking up" as the apostles did while they watched Jesus ascend into heaven where He has gone to prepare a place for us (Jn 14:2).

And finally with our Lord's Ascension into heaven our own earthly mission begins as we all participate in the great commission to bring Jesus to all the nations of the world. Jesus is in heaven and He is with us interceding on our behalf. Therefore let us rejoice in the Ascension of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who has gone to heaven before us and now beckons us to follow Him there, where He is preparing a place for us.

CCC = Catechism of the Catholic Church