

## HOMILY FOR THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD - SOLEMNITY.



ACTS 1:1-11, PSALM 47:2-3, 6-9, EPHESIANS 1:17-23,  
MATTHEW 28:16-20.



**MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS.**

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, today is the 7th and the last Sunday of Easter Season. The feast of “The Ascension of the Lord” that we celebrate today was actually last Thursday - exactly 40 days after Easter. Still, because of its importance and for pastoral reasons, we are allowed to move it to this Sunday, as we have done today. “The Ascension of the Lord” is a special event in the life of Jesus and an important feast in the Church. How, therefore, do we look at it? What actually is the meaning of Ascension, and what is its significance for us today?

Firstly, Ascension is a glorification of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and it was an event expected after His Resurrection. As a matter of fact, the suffering and Death of Jesus, His Resurrection, His Ascension, and Pentecost form one unit, and they are



inseparably linked, each necessary implying the others. We do watch games and sports, and we often see that when a team or player wins, soon after the match is over, the key player of the winning team or the winning player is joyfully lifted high by their supporters. It was the same with Jesus - the Resurrection was His victory over sin and death - and, immensely filled with joy, God the Father lifted Him to heaven in His arms - and this we call the Ascension. Now that Jesus awaits us in heaven, His Ascension is the hope of our glorification and a guarantee that we will meet Him there. Moreover, Ascension is a setting stage for Pentecost - for a new heart, a new spirit, and a new

power of faith, a feast we will be celebrating next Sunday. When the Father took Jesus into heaven, He also made special provisions for His departure: He would send down the Holy Spirit. As the Gospel of Luke says, Jesus promised His disciples that they would be “clothed with power from on high.”

Secondly, Ascension marks the end of Jesus' earthly work of redemption; He stopped appearing to His disciples and was no longer with them in a physical sense. But it did not mean that Jesus' mission came to an end. In today's Scripture

Readings, we hear that immediately before His Ascension, Jesus entrusted His mission to His disciples: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” The same mission is now ours, both as individuals and as a community of believers - as Church. Even though we were not there two thousand years ago, we are called to give witness to Christ's life, death, and resurrection. This saving work begun by Jesus is now to be continued by the Church through us, her members. Jesus is present in the Church in a different manner; He is the invisible leader of the visible Church. From this day of Ascension onward, the physical presence of Christ becomes sacramental, so that Christ can always be with us in the signs which we call Sacraments - Baptism, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Confirmation, Matrimony, Holy Orders, and the Anointing of the Sick. In these Sacraments, we are allowed to experience the presence of Christ while we are still on earth.

Thirdly, Ascension can be seen as Jesus' parting from His disciples. In the First Reading of today from the Acts of the Apostles, we have a farewell scenario, the intimate moment of separation, well pictured - this shows the departure of Jesus, like a Helium balloon rising higher and higher and finally disappearing in the sky, becoming out of sight. This could have been a sad moment for the disciples, but Jesus fills them with joy through His parting gifts: “Gifts of understanding, so that they can fully comprehend the Scripture; Promise of the power of the Holy Spirit; And a loving final blessing, with the promise that He will never abandon them and will be with them till the end of times.” In the farewell scenario, the disciples were also given a glimpse and assurance of Christ's second and final coming, “May of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This is Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will return in the same way as you have seen Him going into heaven.”



This belief in the afterlife is what we hear in the Second Reading of today from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, “May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you may know what the hope that belongs to His call, what are the riches of glory... and what is surpassing greatness of His power...” What a beautiful prayer that is - and such strange imagery. St. Paul makes this more explicit by telling us that God the Father has Jesus seated “at the right hand in heaven.” To be seated at God's right hand is a Hebrew idiom for ‘To share power with God.’ This is another way of saying

that the Father has made Jesus Lord of heaven and earth - which is what we really celebrate on the feast of the Ascension. St. Paul goes on to explain further that Christ lives, but that we have become His earthly body. We now take on His body. We now need to become Christ for others. Once He left the earth, He gave us His Spirit so that we can carry on His work.

The Gospel Reading from St. Matthew, known in the tradition as ‘the great commission,’ shows Jesus sending His followers out to preach and baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The scope of their mission is universal. They are sent to “all nations,” not only to Israel. At the opening of the passage, Jesus appears as Lord of the universe. The very sight of Him dispels the last lingering doubts of His followers. He speaks in regal fashion, with a word of command. Yet His promise to remain with them always affirms the intimacy of the disciples with their Lord - “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”



To conclude, the feast of “The Ascension of the Lord” is the hope of our glorification and a guarantee to meet our Lord in Heaven. It is a reminder of our salvation, a reminder that our true home is in heaven. So, today we are challenged to look beyond this world to the destiny which we are to share with Christ in heaven. Thus, this world can only be a place of temporary refuge; a world of passage and not a world of permanence. But myopic as we are, unfortunately, we are sometimes caught by the assumption that this is the only life there is. Moreover, this feast of the Ascension is what we need to do while still alive on earth. Jesus, before His Ascension, commissioned His disciples, and us too, to be His witnesses and carry out His mission to the ends of the earth till His return. A big task indeed. But before we can proclaim Jesus to others, our first task is to make Jesus the Lord of our own hearts. This we can do by prayerfully reflecting on His words and by living according to His teachings and commandments. We have to make time to become more and more like Christ in everything. Then we can proclaim the Good News to others not only through our words and deeds, but also through our lives, so that Jesus will also reign in their hearts and, one day, we all will be with Him in heaven. And this is the Good News of today.



PEACE BE WITH YOU!

