

## Homily for the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord

### The Ascension of Jesus and its Challenges.

The ascension of Jesus forty days after his resurrection is a historical fact. There was solid rock evidence to show that Jesus ascended to heaven. The ascension is the completion of salvation history. It is as important as the birth, passion, and resurrection of Jesus. Without the ascension, the salvation story would not have ended. Jesus would be trapped on earth and the hope of heaven made nonsensical. The return of Jesus to heaven testifies to his divine nature as the second person of the Holy Trinity.

The event shows that Heaven is real and there is interconnectedness between earth and heaven. It further shows that God is not detached from human experience. He is fully present in the world, but his love is teleological. Heaven is our home. We are visitors in this world.

Today's solemnity has many implications. It is the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus. In Jn 14: 1-3, Jesus promises that he is going to prepare a place. In Jn 16: 5, he tells the disciples that he is going to the Father. In John 16: 7 he says that it is expedient for him to go otherwise the Comforter will not come.

It is a common theological concept that heaven was closed after the Fall in Gen. 3. Humanity was separated from God, was destroyed in nature, and lost both supernatural and preternatural graces. Baptism, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus broke the power of sin and death. They reopened heaven such that humanity can once more enter it. Jesus was the first person to be resurrected and ascend to heaven after his death. Jn 3: 13 says that no man has ascended to heaven and descended from heaven.

Ascension brings to realization the assurance of the Holy Spirit in John 14: 16- 17. Jesus promised to send a Comforter, another Advocate, the Holy Spirit, that would guide the apostles into all truth and remind them of his teachings. As we wait for it, let us prepare to wait in the upper rooms of our life with the ongoing nine-day novena for the Pentecost next Sunday. We must key into the passing of the baton from the Lord to the Church and activate the great commission. We are Pentecostals. The emphasis is now on waiting and dependence on God's promise through a life of holiness and faith.

The assurance of the second coming of Jesus would not be possible if Jesus never ascended to heaven. Mt. 24: 30 assures that we shall see the son of man coming in great glory. Heb. 9: 28 tells us that Christ will appear a second time, not to bear sin but to bring salvation to those waiting for him. In Acts 1-11, the angel reiterated that Jesus would return in the same way he was seen ascending to heaven.

Christ's ascension is a mission accomplished. His return to heaven marks the end of earthly struggles and the reward of blessedness. There must be an end to all earthly struggles, so we are called as Christians to follow him. We must follow Jesus- the way, the truth, and the life. Jn. 14: 3 tells us that he has gone to prepare a place for us. He would come back and take us so that we could be where he had gone.

The realization that we must work hard to go to heaven places some challenges on us. We must reflect, renounce, and remove every stumbling block that could hinder us from following Jesus. Where do we need to work on ourselves? What branches of addiction do we need to prune? What gutters of sin do we need to fill? Is the pathway to heaven level?

Let us travel light so that our souls can soar to heaven. Matter suffocates and mundanity runs parallel with eternity. Col. 3:2 urges us to set our minds on things above, not on the earthly things. We can do that if we develop an ascension mentality. Jesus had this mindset while he was in the world. In Jn. 2:19 he says 'if you destroy this temple, I will rebuild it in three days. Equally, Jn 20: 17 Jesus said to Mary, 'do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father'.

Do not allow anything to discourage you from having an ascended mindset. I pray that you may ascend over everything that plans to pull you down. We cannot be celebrating the ascended Lord with a descended life of sin.

As the timing of this mandate of Jesus to go and teach all nations is now, let us begin with our homes, with our spouses, parents, children, grandchildren, friends, and neighbors. We are to do so with the joy of the Lord. We commend this resolve to God. May the Holy Spirit bend that which is stubborn in us. May his coming break every yoke of sin in us, amen. Peace be with you.