

Looking Around Us

The Ascension of Our Lord into Heaven (Year C)

June 1, 2025

Fr. Tony Davis

There is an important line in the account of the Ascension that we heard in our first reading today from the Acts of the Apostles. It said that as the Risen Lord was lifted up into the clouds out of their sight, two men dressed in white garments commented to the disciples, "men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky?" This same question could be said of many of us Christians today. We are looking at the sky for Jesus when in fact his Gospel calls us to find him by looking at the world around us.

This past Thursday, May 29, we celebrated the optional memorial of Pope St. Paul VI. Pope Paul was a leading cardinal at Vatican II and was soon elected to the papacy to succeed Pope John XXIII in 1963. For the next 15 years, he dedicated himself to implementing the renewal of the Church by shifting our focus from the sky above to the modern world around us. He did so by putting a stronger emphasis on evangelization. Evangelization is the sharing of our faith so that others may join us.

In his 1975 document on evangelization, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI wrote these challenging words: “the person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give [themselves] to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in turn.” (24) Put differently, one is not fully evangelized until they themselves become an evangelizer to others. This was and is a great challenge to a church that traditionally has looked upward to heaven or inward towards itself, but not outward towards the world.

In today’s Gospel from Luke, before ascending to heaven and sending his disciples out to all the world to share the good news, the Risen Christ tells them, “you are witnesses.” Pope Paul also used the word ‘witness’ frequently about our evangelization efforts. A witness is not someone looking to win an argument, start a war, say a lot of words, force their beliefs onto others, isolate themselves from humanity, or keep what they have for themselves. A witness is rather someone who evangelizes by openly living according to the Gospel values, values such as mercy, peace, outreach, truth, justice, forgiveness, and love. This was how Pope Paul wanted the Church to evangelize in the modern world and one which we should try to recover before it’s too late.

The feast of the Ascension teaches us not to simply look upward towards heaven, but to evangelize by also looking outward to the world around us.

In what ways have we given up, either individually or as a Church, on evangelization? How can we recover this essential element of sharing our faith in an appropriate and respectful way in our present times?

As we continue with this mass, let us pray for a Catholic Church that evangelizes by being witnesses to the world. Let us challenge those among us who have given up on the world or only want to focus heaven above. May we continue the work of evangelization in our present world so that two men dressed in white garments do not one day comment to us, 'Christians, why are you standing there looking at the sky?'