

Homily

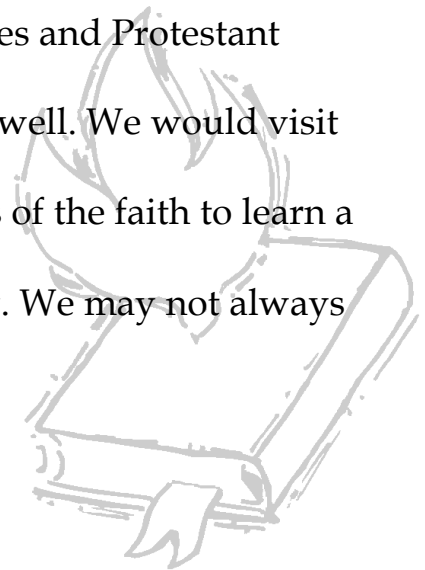
Feast of the Ascension – A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
May 20-21, 2026

Acts 1: 1-11
Ps 47: 2-3, 6-7, 8-9
Eph 1: 17-23
Mt 28: 16-20

In the fifteen years I have taught at the University of St. Francis, I have offered all kinds of different courses from the introduction to Theology to Christianity and the Modern World to Death and Dying, Hispanic Ministry, old and New Testament. The one course on which I wanted to focus for today's homily was the one on World Religions that I offered for the university.

In this particular course, what I chose to do is rent a bus from the university and drive the students from one a place of worship after another of different religious traditions to learn how Buddhists pray, and Hindus and Muslims and Jewish synagogues and Protestant churches, and obviously the Catholic church as well. We would visit these various ministers and monks and teachers of the faith to learn a little bit about the method in which people pray. We may not always



agree with the tenets of the faith of all the religions, but sometimes that methodology really serves us well if we learn how other people pray and how we should in some senses follow the same.

In the Western religions, we focus more on evangelization going door to door. We are supposed to be encountering people, introducing them to the love of God. The believers of Judaism, Islam. Christianity is supposed to go from door to door, from state to state, from country to country to teach the word of God. The Eastern Religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, etc., those are more passive religions where the way of life invites people to come to them so that they can invite them into these places of worship to remove all attachments in the life. The cleanse one's heart of all those things that bind them down so that they can find the true purpose in life. In Hinduism, we learn about harmony with the soul. In Buddhism, the goal is harmony with the self, or self-enlightenment. With Taoism, we seek out harmony with nature.

As we learn from a Vatican II document entitled, *Nostra Aetate*, when you learn about the methods and beliefs of these Eastern Religions, and it helps me concerning religions from the West and how

we believe and pray. For me, I have come to understand why I need to learn self-discipline and incorporate some of the tools used in Eastern Religions like meditation that can help me understand my ultimate goal as a Christian. Another element in the Eastern Religions that really affects me is the idea of meditation, of quiet, of letting your ultimate reality speak to you in silence, essentially.

For instance, in Buddhism (which is kind of the theme of this homily), the focus of Buddhism is to remove the attachments that serve as barriers in one's life to understand the person's ultimate reality. When our class visited a Buddhist temple some years back and we spoke to one of their monks, the spiritual leader used a metaphor for their belief system, the image of "Spider-Man," whose webs represent good karma and bad karma – the point was to clean house and rid one of ALL karma so that one could see clearly their true purpose of life. If not, then the webs that you shoot in this life carry with you into the next life, in the next world, and so on.

Buddhism does not believe in any gods – instead one's life involves suffering which come from the attachments we have in life. Get rid of

those attachments, and we get rid of our suffering, and then we get rid of those attachments from what Buddhism calls the eightfold path. What I like in Buddhism is that they talk about these three root afflictions, three root evils, three poisons that bear us down. And there's all kinds of different definitions, the way they can define it, but essentially they're talking about, uh, greed ill will and delusion.

Buddhists will talk about doubt, disbelief, and despair, which are kind of the opposites of faith, hope and love, those three theological virtues. In the life of the Buddhist, our problem is that we are so hooked up with this world, we are so attached to this world that we so do not want to cleanse ourselves from these attachments and thus we continually are bound to the way of "things."

In a Catholic sense, the same applies – instead of investing ourselves in our Church and God, instead we attach ourselves to things of the world that ultimately have no value – when we are glued to our TVs, glued to our computers, glued to our mobile devices, glued to anything but God but do not cleanse ourselves from these attachments and then the attachments becomes our gods. Then, at the end of this life, we

realize that on the other side there is no value in tv, nor social media, nor handheld devices, nor movies. All that exists is you and God and trying to understand your purpose in life.

How do we get rid of the despair? How do we get rid of the doubt? How do we get rid of the delusion? How do we get rid of our attachments? This is something that plagued the apostles throughout the entire set of scriptures, even from the time of baptism. The apostles themselves doubted the presence of God and were attached to the things of the world all the way up to the time of Jesus' ascension into heaven. St. Thomas infamously doubted that Jesus rose from the dead without feeling the nail marks himself (see the readings from the second Sunday of Easter).

Our doubt is something that plagues us even today. Instead of focusing on Jesus, we attach ourselves and become slaves to the things of the earth; even us ministers, can be attached to things of sin. As a result, we, too, can be corrupt. We can bring people down.

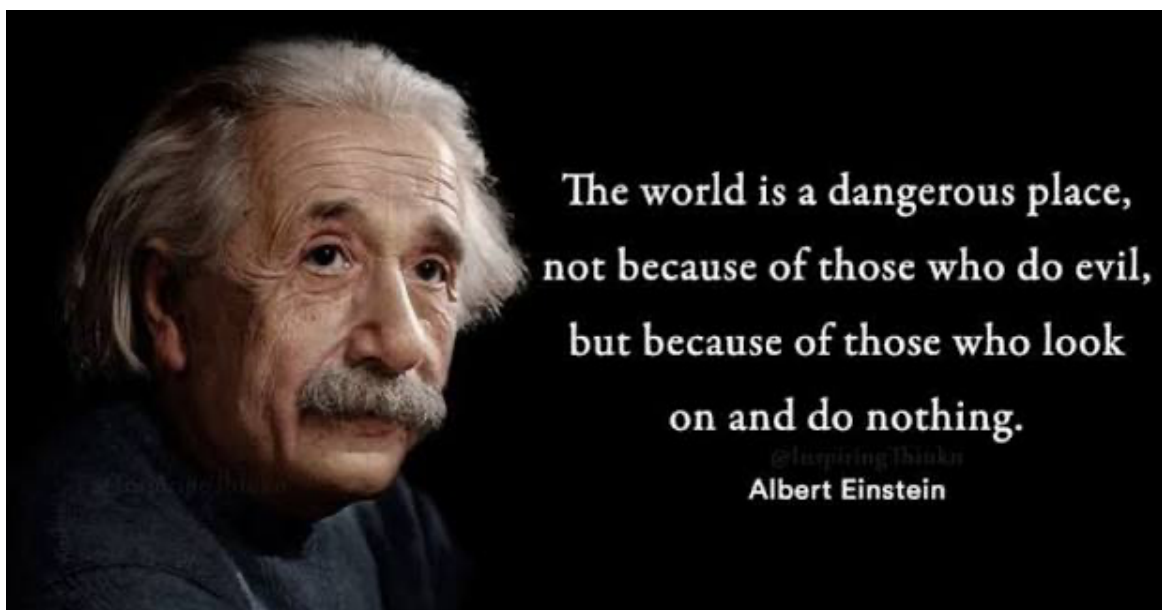
My role of priest is to bring you to Christ and let Christ lead you and guide you. Thus, you should not be coming to Mass or this Church

because of me; you should not be coming to Mass because of the ministers, because all of us, every single one of us, is a sinner... and we get that point. As Christians, you realize that Christ selects us sinners to do God's work, hoping that you look past the human being and you encounter the Holy Spirit that exists within us. Once you and I recognize the Holy Spirit in the other, then you and I realize that God wants us to come to his community because God is in each of us and God unites us together.

So we support each other. We love each other, we forgive each other, and then we gather around a table to receive this meal. What Jesus did at the time of his ascension was that at the end of his life on earth, at the end of his time on earth, after walking the earth, becoming incarnate, taking on a human nature and a human will, eating with us, feeding us, loving us, curing us, dying for us, and then ascending to heaven for us is the way that God paved the way to heaven so that God can *carry* us. If we understand this, our goal in life is to lead others to God so that God can do the same for them as God does for us.

Similar to what we learn from the Eastern Religions, there are too many attachments in our life that bear us down, and that we get so hooked up on the ways of the world that we forget about the ways of God. The ways of God is to remove ourselves from these things of the world so we can see clearly what our purpose is in life. If Buddhists can teach this theme without the presence of God, we more than should do the same *with* God's presence.

As we learn from today's reading from Acts, when the apostles and the believers saw Jesus ascending to heaven, when they received this gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (which we commemorate next week), the apostles were strengthened in their resolve to go out and preach



Christ crucified, knowing very well in the First Century that their lives would be cut short and most likely their lives would be eradicated... which in some ways is the same in the 21st Century. Many good souls decide that they do want to confront members of society on the ways of the world is moving that they decide to hide in society and end up becoming as corrupted as society instead of living the gospel message. This reminds me of a quote attributed to Albert Einstein that often comes to me when reflecting on this topic: *"The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing."*

What I have found generally in life, is that to get to the other side we must embrace our love for God, our love for neighbor, to build good relationships, to tell those important how important they are – how important you are in God's name. If we can achieve at least this, then everything else takes care of itself.

In the course of our faith lives, we are instructed *not* to worry about all these ills of life. We are taught *not* to worry about all the good karma and bad karma or whatever we call the joys or pitfalls in life. All we are

called to do is focus on what God wants us to do, love our God and love our neighbor... “Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil” (Mt 6: 34).

In the Catholic context where God reveals himself fully through his son Jesus Christ, where we understand what the Father wants us to do, is that we need to preach Christ crucified. We need to live the gospel message. We need to turn away from sin and believe in the gospel. We “remember we are dust and unto dust we shall return,” that without God, we go back into the ground and we are stuck in the same world that is attached itself to us but with God leading us, miracles are possible.

So we live a life of love by saying by embracing God’s plan and realizing that *you* are more important than me, *they* are more important than us, because God modeled that example by dying on the cross and ascending into heaven. We do the same thing. Please know I will do what I can to help. I will do what I can to follow Christ’s way as imperfect as I am and as imperfect as you are. That all said, look at what has happened in our parishes when we open our hearts and we live the

gospel message; so many good things have happened and all of this is because of God working through you.

Even so, I encounter so many who continue to doubt us and doubt what success we can accomplish, if we have faith. Every time we start a project at our parishes, every time we start some kind of devotion at our parishes, many people doubt and many people turn away from us because they choose not to believe. As a result, many people dismiss you and me when we bring that smile to the world. Many people show doubt, despair and delusion instead of faith, hope and love.

On this feast of the ascension, I promise you this – I will continue to allow Christ to guide me – I continue to seek out hope in a hopeless world. Please do your part by living this message of Christ crucified as well, by embracing the theological virtues of hope, faith, open love as opposed to doubt, despair, delusion, hate, fear. Believe in the gospel and share that message of faith, hope and love with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.