

FEAST OF THE ASCENSION (Years A, B, C)
5-17-2026 Homily

I. Introduction

A U.S. Army chaplain was stationed in Europe, and one Sunday he said Mass for a group of American servicemen and women in a large cathedral; the theme of his homily was: “Be proud of your Catholic faith, and don’t be afraid to practice it in public.” One of those attending Mass was a young American Navy seaman on shore leave, and he was deeply touched by what he heard. Afterwards he waited outside the cathedral for the chaplain, and when the priest appeared, he went up and asked him, “Father, would you please hear my confession?” The chaplain answered, “Of course, my son,” and to his surprise, the sailor immediately knelt down right there on the sidewalk in front of the cathedral. The priest said, “Son, you can stand instead of kneeling; otherwise, people will stare.” However, the sailor responded, “The heck with them, Father! Let ‘em stare—I’m proud of my faith” (Link, *Illustrated Sunday Homilies*, B, Series I, p. 43).

This is the right attitude for Catholic followers of Christ. We tend to worry too much about what other people think, instead of caring about what God sees in us; we’re often more concerned with not offending others who don’t share our religion than we are with seeking their eternal salvation—which might just depend on whether or not someone takes the time to witness the Gospel to them; we sometimes act as if our Catholic faith is something to be ashamed of, or least be toned down, rather than a priceless gift to be shared. We should be proud of our faith, we should be convinced that it’s the greatest spiritual treasure anyone can possess, and we should be willing to live it out in public—for that’s an important way in which other people can be reminded of God. Jesus told all His followers to go out and share the Good News of salvation—and every day we have chances to do this.

II. Development

When people are getting ready for Christmas, many times the process involves decorating indoors and outdoors, using strings of colorful Christmas lights. Newer sets can be easy to use, but—at least in the past—some strands of Christmas lights were temperamental: if just one little light bulb burned out, or if only one light socket went bad, the whole string became useless until the problem was located and fixed. When the electric current passes through the strand of lights, it’s not supposed to stop, or be blocked, at a particular point; only if it passes all the way through are the results joyful and beautiful. So it is with faith: rather than keeping it to ourselves due to fear, indifference, or laziness, we’re supposed to pass it on, to witness to it and share it, letting the light of God’s grace be reflected in our attitudes, words, and deeds. After Jesus ascended into Heaven, two angels suddenly appeared to the apostles and asked, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky?”—in other words, “Don’t just stand there; prepare to get busy with the mission Jesus gave you.” Our Lord explains in the Gospel just what this mission is: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation.” This is our assignment, too; our Savior wants our faith to help other people come to believe in Him.

III. Conclusion

A boy named Ryan took his Catholic faith very seriously, and felt the Lord wanted him to share it; the problem was that Ryan was very shy, and knew he wouldn't be much good answering questions about Catholicism, let alone approaching someone himself and bringing up the subject. Then an idea came to him. Ryan did a lot of reading, and was aware that many pamphlets or brochures were available on Catholicism and its teachings, so he began setting aside some of his allowance each week to purchase them—and then he quietly and anonymously left them in place where people might notice and pick them up: on the public bulletin boards in store lobbies, in waiting areas and reception rooms, at the bus terminal, and in various other places where free literature was available. One day Ryan overheard a woman, a friend of his parents, telling them that she had become a Catholic, and that her husband had returned to the Church after being away for a long time. “It all started with a pamphlet,” she said; “I found it in the hospital waiting room.” Needless to say, Ryan was very excited to hear that one of the pamphlets he had distributed hit the mark and made a real difference in someone's life (Link, *op. cit.*, p. 43).

Some of us are shy or quiet like Ryan, and are much more comfortable working for the Lord anonymously, or behind the scenes—and that's all right; if we ask the Lord, He will give us opportunities to serve Him that way . . . though He may on occasion ask us to move slightly beyond our comfort zones—though if He does, He'll hold our hands the entire time. Others of us are much more direct and forceful, willing to talk to anyone about almost anything, and very good at defending our faith when it's questioned or attacked. That's a necessary and important ministry . . . though sometimes the Lord might call us to be a bit more prudent and patient, waiting for the right opportunity to speak to someone, instead of just barging ahead. If we form the habit of silently asking the Holy Spirit to help and guide us, we'll know when to speak and what to say, and when to remain quiet. Regardless of our personality types, our strengths and weaknesses, and our preferences and dislikes, every single one of us is called to play our part in helping spread the Gospel.

Every day we have opportunities to share our faith: by giving a good example, doing favors for those in need, defending our religious beliefs and moral values, doing what's right instead of simply going along with the crowd, taking the time to listen to someone with a problem, making a special effort to be kind and patient with people who irritate us, contributing to missionary collections, volunteering in our parish, being approachable if people have questions about the faith, and praying for others. Sharing the Gospel might be hard at first, but it's worth it; there have been many cases where people have come back to the Church because they've observed the faith of a practicing Catholic—and if some people are offended by our example, as the sailor said, “the heck with 'em.” Jesus never stopped to consider whether His words might offend someone; His priority was doing the mission He had been given by His Heavenly Father. In the same way, each of us has a responsibility to do what's right; this is part of God's plan for us. The Ascension means that Jesus is no longer physically present in the world; instead of doing things Himself, He relies on us to use His Holy Spirit and to carry on His mission. With His help, each of us is up to the challenge.