

The Ascension of Our Lord, May 17, 2026

Friends, it's good to be back here in Colville. What did you do to your chapel? This is not an improvement! I will have to talk to Fr. Kenny. However, friends, this is a wonderful way of getting everybody to fill in the front rows. Inevitably, in every church I've been to over the last, whatever years, and I sub a lot. I travel. I work at Whitworth University, and I travel. And the parishes I go to inevitably have all the front rows empty. There was a church I helped at about eight months ago or so in Colfax. The church down there is about three times the size of this building. Huge church. Could have probably fit three hundred people in it or so. And there were just maybe about fifty people or less for Mass. And I come in for the first time, and I start Mass, and I look up, and everybody is sitting at the very back. So, mind you, this is three times the depth of this space right here. And I'm like, why is everybody in the parish doing all the way back here? And so, I start Mass, and I come up to the ambo, and I start my homily, and I just simply ask: "Why are you all way in the back of the church?" They said, "Well, the priest that was here before, the pastor that was here before, [who I was filling in for, and he got reassigned, so he wasn't there anymore.] kept asking us questions during the homily. Every Sunday, he would ask us questions, so we all decided to sit in the back." I was there for about six weeks so the next Sunday, when I started Mass, they were all sitting in the back. During my homily, I stepped to the side which room I don't do, and we really should not as a priest, but exceptional circumstances. I stepped off the ambo and went down the aisle, and I stayed right in front of them and I gave my homily. But it's a very Catholic thing to have front rows empty.

So, on that note, I have a question for you. Two questions to think about for a moment. Number one, who is in Heaven, body, and soul? So, we know Jesus is. That's the day that we commemorate today. This is the Solemnity of the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven. He rises bodily into Heaven to be at the right hand of the Father. So, we don't he is there. Second person that most people hopefully will remember is Mary. Mary, in her Dormition, we don't know if she died. Did you know that, actually? We don't know that she died because death is a consequence of original sin. And Mary didn't have original sin, so she wasn't subject to death. The word that is used to describe Mary's death is a Dormition. She fell asleep, but then she was brought to heaven, body, and soul. That's called her Assumption.

But there's a third person in Heaven with his body. He is from the Old Testament. Remember the story about Elijah, the prophet? So, Elijah and his protégé, Elishia, the prophet, who he was teaching how to be a good prophet, were walking along. And Elijah said, "My time has come. I must leave you now." And Elishia says "No. Elijah, don't leave me, don't go." Elijah says, "If I don't go, I cannot send you the Holy Spirit." And then Elishia says, "Well, then go, but then send me and give me a double portion of the Spirit." And Elijah is taken up in the fiery chariot and gives Elishia a double portion of the Spirit, and Elishia becomes a great prophet.

In that story, friends, is the answer to the third question I have for you. Why did Jesus ascend to Heaven? Why not just stay here? He rose from the dead. He's in a resurrected body. He's overcome death. He saved us from our sins. He's redeemed the world. He can no longer die. Why not just stay with us? He could have done that.

And could have just continued doing what he did as an itinerant preacher and teacher, of course, the Savior of the world, but he could be walking around everywhere in the world till the end of time, so that we can go and see him. That didn't happen because if he had stayed here, he would still be subject to the laws of nature, to the laws of this world, which means that he could not in his physical body, as a physical person, could not just simply multiply himself everywhere all at the same time. That's not possible in our physical world. In Heaven, it is, but here on Earth, it isn't. And so, he ascends to Heaven in order to give us the Holy Spirit. That's the reason why he went to heaven. Because without him being at the right hand of the Father, he is not able to send the Holy Spirit as he promised. And this is why he said, "If I don't go, you will not receive the Holy Spirit. I have to go to my Father to send you the Spirit." And that's why Jesus ascended into Heaven.

So, what's the big deal about the Holy Spirit? Well, friends, everything. It's through the power of the Holy Spirit that the Lord is able to be present to every single one of us now in a way that he couldn't have been if he had been here in his physical body still on earth. The reason why we can pray to Jesus, we can have a personal, loving, connected relationship with him, with God and that is available to everybody around the world for all time, at the same time is because of the Holy Spirit. You don't wonder about that? How is it that we believe in Jesus? Do you believe it's important to have a relationship? How in the world can that relationship be personal between me and Jesus if it's personal for everybody else with Jesus at the same time? How is that even possible? Does it make any sense at all? Well, of course not.

Unless we factor in the presence of the Holy Spirit who communicates God's life, the presence of Jesus to all of us. And that's why this event is so important. And that's why Sunday next we commemorate the fiftieth day after Easter, which is Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit. So, Jesus ascends to Heaven, all the apostles and the disciples go to the upper room, and they stay there and they pray for nine days. And that nine days of prayer that happened 2,000 years ago in that upper room where the Last Supper was said is the first novena in the Church. And they were praying to decide what to do, and they didn't know what to do. They were afraid. Jesus had left them. And then on that ninth day, the Holy Spirit comes, and the opposite of all hell breaks loose, the opposite of that happens, and all graces are given; the Church is born; Peter goes out and preaches the message of Jesus' resurrection. People are converted, 3,000 people get baptized on that same day, and then they go and spread the Gospel and the good news and the message of our salvation through Jesus to the entire known world. Because of the Holy Spirit.

So, friends, for us, it's really important for us to understand the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. What does the third person of the Trinity, what does he bring us? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, forgiveness, gentleness, self-control - all the gifts, all the fruits of the Holy Spirit are brought to us, and that's what brings healing to our hearts, and that's what gives us life. And that's what allows us to go out of our selves and to love God and to love others the way we are called to and eventually, go to Heaven. It's because... And without the ascension, and without the Ascension there is no Holy Spirit and with no Holy Spirit, there is no salvation.

So, today is a good day to remember these things, these key items in our faith, to brush up on the answers to the questions that I will bring next time I come to visit you. And I'm sure all of you will do very well, as you always do.

And friends as we need this transition every year during the assignment change, transition, which is difficult for everybody. I mean, at the end of the day, I am old now. I don't like change too much. I just want to stay quiet. But we go where the Bishop calls us to go. We sign up to serve. For priests leaving a parish, it's very much like a separation because you grow attachments, and you grow used to the way things are being done, and then a new guy comes in, and you have to start all over again, where things get changed again, or you don't like his personality, or whatever, his dog barks too much, or whatever.

We had a priest who brought his dog in a confessional. Like, he would lay outside the confessional, but he would lay at the at the foot of the at the steps of the altar, too. We asked, is the bishop going to say anything about this? But he was a really good dog. And a very kind priest too, just a gentle, gentle soul.

But change is difficult, but at the end of the day, we're not here for priest or for a particular parish. We're here for the Lord. And we get through this life, which really is a valley of tears and go home to Heaven where we can rest. Finally, like forever.

So, keeping things in perspective is very important and not to be wrapped up in the pettiness sometimes that goes along with parish life, for all of us. We're all imperfect. We're all challenged, but we're all on this journey together, and we're here to help each other as

much as possible and make ourselves available to God's life and his grace that really propels us along this incredible adventure. It really is an incredible adventure.

So, please keep that in mind. Please keep all of us in your prayers who are moving. This is the biggest move in assignments that the Bishop has made in ten years. He has to move priests to take care of parishes and priests get sick, and they get injured, they get in trouble, and they got to be moved and all that. He said that this is the biggest one he has made in ten years. He said he was going to go away for a month and not see anybody after he made these changes.

So, you know, pray for all of us. It was really quite a beautiful journey at the end of the day. And it's well worth the effort, well worth the effort. God Bless you.