

## **HOMILY for the FEAST of the ASCENSION of OUR LORD – Year ABC**

An elderly woman was nervous about making her first flight in an airplane. So, before takeoff, she went to speak to the captain about her fears.

“You will bring me down safely, won’t you?” she anxiously inquired.

“Don’t worry, madam,” was his friendly reply. “I haven’t left anyone up here yet!”

Anyway, this Sunday the Church celebrates the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord. This feast marks the completion of our Lord’s mission of salvation as He returns to God the Father. His return to Heaven sure makes us feel sad & causes some of us to worry. We might think that Jesus has abandoned us; & we might be all alone in this world. But, He knew how we would feel after His departure. He understood the challenges that we would encounter every day. We would be persecuted for our Christian beliefs as He did. We’d be bombarded with misinformation & temptations of the world to lure us away from our Lord’s mission of salvation. We’d be overwhelmed by our daily difficulties that might cause us to forget about following Jesus. So, what would Jesus do to help us deal with His departure & prepare for this transition?

Before I answer that question for us, let’s explore on how we feel about Jesus’ departure. We’re usually excited & looking forward to welcome someone new. We anticipate & prepare ourselves to see a new family member or friend. That is why we’re so joyful & anxious about Christmas & the birth of Jesus. His birth brings us God’s love & the miracle of Christmas. It gives us hope & helps us to look beyond this world. That new world is where we can experience all sorts of miracles & need to see it through the eyes of faith. If Christmas is a joyful occasion for us Christians, the Ascension of our Lord makes us feel sad. For we have to bid farewell to someone we know well & love dearly like Jesus. If you’ve ever had to say good bye to a dear family member or a good friend before, you’d know how it would feel as Jesus’ disciples on this Feast of the Ascension of our Lord.

Jesus knew how sad & overwhelming we might feel about His departure from this world. That’s why He left with His disciples 2 things – the Holy Spirit & His mission of salvation. Here’s how this Sunday’s First Reading tells us about the gift of the Holy Spirit that Jesus left for us. It says, “In my first account, Theophilus, I dealt with all that Jesus did & taught us until the day He has taken up to Heaven, having first instructed the apostles He had chosen through the Holy Spirit.” It goes on, “...You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes down on you; then you are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea & Samaria, yes, even to the ends of the earth.” So, evidently Jesus relied on the Holy Spirit to choose the early disciples & instruct them on what to do after His departure. He also wanted to leave with them the Holy Spirit & asked them to rely on that to carry on His remaining mission. He asked them to witness to the world everything they have heard & seen from Him. In case we’ve forgotten about that mission or not realized what we’re supposed to do, Jesus left with us these last words in today’s Gospel, “Thus it is written that the Messiah must suffer & rise from the dead on the third day. In His name, penance for the remission of sins is to be preached to the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of all this.” So, Jesus wanted us to keep on sharing with the world about His suffering, death, & resurrection. He also called on us to ask the world to convert & turn its life over to Christ. It needs to turn away from its former ways & welcome the virtuous way of life of Christ.

In the last few Sundays, we’ve heard a lot about the mission that Jesus wanted His disciples to continue on in memory of Him. He asked us to bring the world closer to Him & not push it away from Him. He called on us to share His Good News with the world & help it see the benefits of following His way of life & belonging to the Kingdom of Heaven. He pleaded with us to invite more people into His Church with a baptism & save as many souls as possible. After all, Jesus came to

save the world & sacrificed His life on the Cross for it. Unfortunately, two thousand years later the Church has not been faithful to that mission & followed Jesus' last wish. It has tried to baptize some infants & invite some adults to meet Jesus through its RCIA program annually. Unfortunately, it's been distracted by all sorts of worldly things such as fundraising, money, political fights, & cultural issues. Most of its leaders & members would rather debate & argue about political & cultural issues than trying to come up with better ways to save more souls & increase membership for His Church. Some local churches would love to bash the Catholic Church & other churches instead of telling the world all the wonderful things about the being the disciple of Jesus. Besides those problems, the Church leadership has failed to live up to its vocation as some clergy have committed sexual abuse against minors. As you can see, the Church has ignored the mission of Jesus & gone its own ways. Hopefully its leaders & lay members would soon realize their mistakes & return to the mission that Jesus asked them to do.

I'd like to share with you a couple of comments regarding the shooting at an elementary school in Texas & around our country. First, everyone must learn to respect human life & its precious value that our Creator has given us. Let's put the unborn child or an embryo aside for now & focus on real human beings like those 21 children & 2 teachers in the school in Texas. If we do not respect those human lives regardless of their skin color & age & immigration/criminal status, we would destroy them like what that teenager did without thinking twice about it. Our whole country, especially political & religious leaders, has to make it the cornerstone of our American constitution! Second, we need to teach our citizens – young & old - in school, worshipping places, work places, sports fields, entertainment centers, & other gatherings the importance of building up & doing good things instead of tearing down & carrying out hurtful things to our neighbors. We have to encourage everyone to do at least one good thing a day for one's family, neighborhood, church, school, community, & country. We should inspire more role models like our veterans, whom we honor today to help our citizens make great personal sacrifices & positive contributions to our country & the world. We should ask yourself often, "What have I done for my family, church, community, & country lately?" By focusing on community sacrifices & common good, we can lessen the senseless hurt & killing that we might inflict on others around us. Finally, we must teach our children at the young age how to deal with anger & resolve their differences. Pulling out a gun to shoot & kill people we disagree with is NOT the right way to control our anger & resolve our differences. Don't wait till adulthood to take an anger management class that the Court might order us to do. Unless our country/society follows those 3 simple rules, we will continue to have those mass shootings regardless of how hard we try to work on gun laws & mental illness.

My dear brothers & sister, the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord might be hard for us to believe. But, it simply marks the end of Jesus' mission on earth & calls on us to begin our part by continuing His mission of salvation. We need to get back on Jesus' business of saving souls & increasing membership for His Church. We have to detach ourselves from political & cultural issues & stop pledging our allegiance to worldly leaders. The only one we should follow is the man on the Cross who would send us the Holy Spirit to show us the way in this world & help us through our daily challenges. If we're faithful to Jesus & His mission, He'll reward us with our own resurrection & a place in the Kingdom of God after this life.