

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

This Sunday's Feast is about the Ascension of our Lord to Heaven; & reflecting on that I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

Two eighty-year-old men had been friends since their Little League baseball days. One of them came down with a terminal illness & his best friend was with him by his deathbed.

"Will you do me a favor?" the healthy friend asked. "I'm hoping there is baseball in Heaven. When you get there, can you find out & let me know somehow?"

The dying man said, "We've been friends for almost all of our lives. I will try & get the answer to you as soon as possible."

Several days after the old man's death, his friend was sleeping when he had a vivid dream. His lifelong friend appeared to him & said, "Hey buddy, the Good News is that there is definitely baseball in Heaven, my friend! The Bad News is that you're pitching this Wednesday!"

Anyway, this Sunday we are called to celebrate the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord. This feast reminds us of Jesus' return to Heaven & His completion of the soul-saving mission assigned by God the Father. The Good News is that our Lord finished His mission. The Bad News is that He had to say farewell to His disciples & return to God the Father. As you might know, saying goodbye to someone we know well & love dearly is never easy. This past week I had another opportunity to administer the Last Rite to an old friend who chose to become Catholic at one of the churches I have served in my priestly ministry. Her family gathered around her & prayed with her one last time. Although Joan was alert & jovial, everyone at this gathering was somber & tearful because they knew that this family member would soon depart the earth & go to her new home in Heaven. During this religious ritual, everyone had a chance to come to this family member & tell her how much they appreciated her. There was no dry eye as the whole family prayed with her & reminisced about their past experience with her.

The reason I share with you that experience is to help us relate to this feast of the Ascension of our Lord a little better. As Jesus prepared to return to Heaven, His disciples gathered around Him to say goodbye to Him. They sure tried to recall everything they did with Him. The three disciples Peter, James, & John perhaps remembered how Jesus took them up Mount Tabor & let them meet Moses & Elijah – two important figures in the Jewish tradition - & have a glimpse of Heaven. Peter himself could share with the group of the disciples many stories about the wonderful time that he had with Jesus. The Lord helped heal his mother-in-law when they visited her. The Master also let him walk on the water coming toward him on a dark night. Andrew would want to add that he would never forget how Jesus fed over five thousand people from five loaves of bread & two fish. Because he was able to find a boy with that little provision & bring it to Jesus who made the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves & fish possible. Those are some of the sweet memories that the disciples might have talked about at the departure of their master. Those stories helped them appreciate Jesus a lot more & realize how much they would miss him. His departure would leave a huge hole in their hearts & make them feel precarious about their future. They would lose a dear friend & a caring supporter. They would have to be on their own & fend for themselves as Jesus returned to Heaven.

Besides the sadness & uncertainty that Jesus's departure might leave behind with His disciples, the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord calls us to take a serious look at Heaven. For

that is where Jesus was heading after His departure from the earth. Some of us might not think about where we would be heading to after this life. Others might not even care what would happen to us at the end of our earthly life. However, someone came up after a funeral that I did recently to ask why I talked about our soul heading to Heaven after this life because she never heard that before. I was not surprised to hear that reaction. Since the priests, deacons, ministers, & even bishops who did the homilies at most of the funerals that I have attended would talk about everything else except the destination of the deceased after this life. The homilists would entertain the congregation at a Christian funeral with funny stories about the deceased & make everyone feel good. But, they would leave you wondering what would happen to the deceased, particularly his/her soul. If you don't believe about that missing spiritual message at a Christian funeral, pay attention to the homily/sermon at the next funeral that you might attend & see if the homilist would tell you where the deceased would go after this life. In fact, I heard a minister who talked about how evil Communism/Socialism is at the funeral of a Veteran without any mention about where his soul would go.

I'm not surprised to see the lady who came up to me after a recent funeral to inquire me more about the soul heading to Heaven after this life. For our religious leaders have been so obsessed with earthly politics that they have neglected their important duty of educating their faithful & the world about Heaven & the eternal life. It is no wonder why people have focused more on the present world & material things than the next world & the soul. My friends, the most valuable thing that God has entrusted to each human being at birth is the soul. In fact, most ancient scholars & wise figures like Socrates & Aristotle discussed a lot about the soul or the form of each human being in their writing. For they believed that it never dies; & we better cherish & protect it from the evil influences & power of darkness. Unfortunately, we don't see that happen in our day & age. Jesus could not agree more about the priceless value of our soul; & He once said, "Fear not the one who can kill only your body. Rather, fear the one who could put both your body & soul into Gehenna." So, Jesus wants to remind us what matters the most to us Christians, namely, our soul & Heaven.

My dear brothers & sisters, the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord is a bitter sweet celebration for us who remain behind. For we're sad to say farewell to a loved one like Jesus & feeling uncertain about our future. But, today's feast also lets us know that Jesus was returning to Heaven to prepare a place for us. We are happy for Him & His completed mission of soul saving. We should continue His mission & keep in mind at all time what matters the most for us Christians. It's not this body & all the material things. Rather, it's our soul! It's not this present life & current world. Rather, it's Heaven & the eternal life! That is what today's feast is all about.