

HOMILY for the FEAST of the ASCENSION of THE LORD – ABC

Reflecting on the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

Brett Favre & Jared Geoff die & go to Heaven. After Brett Favre enters the Pearly Gates, God takes him on a tour & shows him a little two-bedroom house with a faded Packers banner hanging from the front porch & says, "This is your house, Brett. You know, most people don't get their houses up here."

Favre looks at the house, then turns around & looks at the one sitting on top of the hill. It's a huge two-story mansion with Michigan flags lining both sides of the sidewalk & a huge Lions banner hanging between the marble columns.

Favre says, "Hey! How come I get this little two-bedroom house, & Jared Geoff gets a huge mansion?"

God says, "That's not Geoff's house, it's mine."

Anyway, this Sunday the Church invites us to celebrate the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord to mark the completion of the Jesus' mission of salvation that He started at Christmas as He returned to Heaven to reunite with God the Father. But, He left behind the Holy Spirit to guide His disciples & watch over the early Church. He also promised to return to bring all His followers to Heaven & join Him in His home. That is basically the gist of the Feast of the Ascension. This Sunday's Gospel describes the scene of the Ascension of the Lord as following: "...He then led them out near Bethany, & with hand upraised, blessed them. As He blessed, he left them, & was taken up to Heaven. They fell down to do Him reverence, then returned to Jerusalem filled with joy." Meanwhile, this Sunday's First Reading tells us some additional details of that historical event in our Christian faith this way: "...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." It continues, "No sooner had He said this than He was lifted up before their eyes in a cloud which took Him from their sight. They were still gazing up into the Heavens where two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking up at the skies? This Jesus who has been taken from you will return, just as you saw Him go up into the Heavens.'"

Besides marking the end of Jesus' mission of salvation, what are some spiritual lessons that the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord could teach us? First & foremost, this feast reminds us that our ultimate goal is to get to Heaven because that is where Jesus is; & we want to be with Him. We want to see Him & other important figures in our Christian faith such as the saints & the angels. We also want to ask Him some questions that have intrigued/baffled us in this life. For example, why did God allow good people to suffer in this life while bad folks enjoyed a fun life & got away with their evil acts? What were the reasons for God to let wars, diseases, tragedies, pain, & suffering happen in this life? Or, how come we have had so many religions & traditions that might confuse us in this world? I'm sure you'll have other questions that you'd like to inquire Him about. Or, you might have some people whom you'd love to meet again in Heaven. For me, the greatest blessing about Heaven is that it will truly be a home where I'd enjoy peace & happiness. I will not have to worry about daily necessities, future plans, sadness, pain, suffering, or unexpected things. All I would need to focus on is to enjoy being in company with Jesus for eternity. Wouldn't it be wonderful for us to do that forever?

Heaven, as you can see, is the ultimate destination/the Promised Land for God's people. Unfortunately, it is the topic that bishops, priests, ministers, & deacons preach about the least. Even at funerals you'll hear about all kinds of things about the deceased except Heaven. I've been to lots of priests' funerals & have not always heard preachers say where the deceased would end up. If we Christians do not aim for Heaven & preachers would not let us know that the deceased are heading home to the Promised Land, then what is the purpose of being a Christian? If you don't believe me, pay attention to the homily next time you attend a funeral & see if the preacher would say anything about Heaven. Unfortunately, the Church & its Christian members have spent too much time thinking about politics & very little time learning about Heaven in my humble opinion. Otherwise, why would anyone want to think about Heaven & the next life? If we would spend more time discussing & dreaming about Heaven, we would be less afraid of dying & fight less with one another about trivial things in this life. Instead, we would concentrate more on how to help one another win a place in Heaven with Jesus. The Church needs to shift its focus from this world to Heaven & talk more about it because that is its primary goal/purpose.

Besides Heaven, the second goal that the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord wants us to keep in mind is to witness to the world about His resurrection & Good News. We are called to give positive testimony & good example of Christian living to the world. We need to ask ourselves each what we should do to attract more new members to our Christian way of life & make Jesus proud of us. Sadly, we have had lots of infighting over social & political issues & all sorts of scandals over the years. Lately, we have even had Christians who have exploited our Christian faith to get rich & gain some personal profits. If we keep doing that, we will tear our beloved Church apart & push away potential Christians. Jesus & the early disciples had worked hard to build up our Christian Church & even paid for it with their own blood. If we do not do any good things to attract new members for it, at least we should not harm it or try to destroy it. That is the mission that Jesus left behind for us before His return to Heaven.

My dear brothers & sisters, what does the Ascension of the Lord to Heaven mean to you? Does it give you hope & promise of a new life beyond the current one? And what must you do to give positive witness of the risen Christ & His Good News to the world? If each day we could do one good deed to bring hope & God's love to someone in this Jubilee Year, we would surely make Jesus proud & advance His mission of salvation one step closer to the reality until His return.