

Ascension - B  
Acts 1:1-11;  
Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13;;  
Mark 16:15-20  
Little Flower - 5/12/24

My Brothers and Sisters,

The parish staff and I want to wish all mothers a very happy and blessed Mother's Day. We include all grandmothers, great-grandmothers, and those who take the place of mothers in caring for children.

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord. Forty days after Easter Jesus ascended into heaven and was seated at the right hand of his Father. To better understand the Ascension, today I would like to discuss the changes in the Liturgy since the Second Vatican Council.

Those of us who are older remember when Ascension was always celebrated on a Thursday and was a Holyday of Obligation. It was celebrated on Thursday because Jesus ascended into heaven on the 40<sup>th</sup> day of Easter. However, because this feast is so important, it was moved to Sunday so that more people would be in Church to celebrate the Feast.

In the pre-Vatican II Liturgy, the Easter candle was extinguished after the Gospel on Ascension Thursday, a dramatic sign that Jesus would no longer be present in the way he was before. However, in the post-Vatican II Liturgy, the Easter candle remains lit at every Mass through Pentecost Sunday. This reminds us that the Paschal Mystery of Jesus' dying and rising is really only complete with the sending of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

This feast is important for two reasons. The Ascension marks Jesus' glorification at the right hand of his Father from where he shall return in glory. Second, at the Last Supper, Jesus told his disciples that it was good for them that he go because he could only send the Holy Spirit upon them if he returned to the Father [Jn. 16:7].

Before his Ascension, Jesus commissioned his apostles, "*Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.*" However, as Jesus was ascending, his disciples were staring intently at the sky. "*Suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky?'*" Asking them why they were standing staring at the sky, the angels were telling the disciples that Christians cannot passively await Christ's return in glory. The angels were reminding them that Jesus had entrusted the Church to them, that they were now responsible for fulfilling the mission Jesus had given them, i.e., to "*Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation*" [NAB, 1966]. That mission has now been entrusted to us.

Today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians offers some guideposts for sharing the Good News of Jesus. First, Paul calls the Ephesians as individuals and as a community to live a life worthy of their call. He then stresses the importance of unity within the Christian community. In other words, we proclaim the Good News or Gospel of Jesus Christ by living Christian virtues and by living as a community united in faith, love, and hope. Today we are a divided Church. A divided Church cannot effectively proclaim the Gospel.

Paul also tells the Ephesians that "*grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.*" He goes on to list some of the gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. As unique individuals, all of us are gifts to the Church in our uniqueness. I would suggest we include mothers in that list. Over the years, many studies have shown that mothers have the biggest impact on the faith of their children. In the former blessing prayer at infant baptisms, we were reminded that parents are the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith and pray that they will be the best of teachers.

Next Sunday we will celebrate Pentecost, the coming of the promised Holy Spirit. This week the Church asks us to prepare for Pentecost by praying daily for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit: "Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth."