

## Solemnity of Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ

*Theme: Each One Of Us Is Called By Jesus To Continue His Earthly Ministry*

**T**oday in our Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, we join the universal Church to commemorate the Solemnity of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven. In some dioceses in the US and outside US, this Solemnity was celebrated on Thursday, May 18. Ascension reminds us we are 'Heaven-bound people,' not 'Earth-bound people.' One day Jesus will raise our mortal bodies and bring us to be with him in heaven.

St. Paul, in the second reading which is his Letter to the Ephesians, gives us the theological meaning of the Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ. St. Paul says God has glorified Jesus Christ by raising him above all earthly powers making him the Head of the Church and the Lord of creation.

Both the first reading and the Gospel describe Jesus' commission and his promise to send the Holy Spirit to his apostles and followers. St. Luke, in the first reading that is in the Acts of the Apostles, describes Jesus' appearances after his resurrection to the disciples, his ascension into heaven, and his promise of the Holy Spirit to the apostles. Luke tells us the ascension took place 40 days after Jesus' resurrection. Then 10 days after his ascension, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost as he has promised.

Today's Gospel reading (Matthew 28:16-20) is what theologians referred to as "The Great Commission." Each Gospel writer has a unique account of Jesus' appearance and ascension. For instance, Luke limits Jesus' resurrection and appearance to Jerusalem and emphasizes repentance and forgiveness of sins- Luke 24:46-48. For St. John in his gospel, Jesus empowers his disciples to forgive or retain sins. John 20:23. St. Matthew's main focus right from the beginning is Jesus' teaching. The Sermon on the Mount, early in Jesus' ministry (chapters 5-7) form the largest body of Jesus' teaching in the New Testament. It is interesting to know that Jesus started major parts of his earthly ministry in Galilee. He returned there after his resurrection from where he commissioned his apostles to carry on his ministry throughout the world. St. Matthew tells us Jesus commissioned the eleven disciples to preach the Gospel to all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He promised to send them the Holy Spirit. He will also be with them until the end of the age. It is great comfort, consolation that Jesus promised he would be with us until the end of the world/age. As we know, Jesus never fails his promises. Remember, he said he is not only the Way and the Life but also he is the Truth. No matter the storms of life you may be going through, remember, Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, IS WITH YOU.

The number "eleven" reminds us of Judas' treachery. The number 'eleven' stands for imperfection. Bruner says: "The number 'eleven' limps...The Church that Jesus sends into the world is fallible, 'elevenish,' 'imperfect.' Yet Jesus uses exactly such a church to do his perfect work. Jesus takes this imperfect number and gives it a perfect vocation." (Brunner, 1090)

My dear people of God, each one of us by the virtue of our baptism is empowered by Jesus Christ to go out and be his witnesses throughout the world. To witness to Jesus means we live our Christian life. That is to say, we act justly, lovingly, and peacefully to ourselves and to others. He knows our strengths and weaknesses, yet he has called us to continue his earthly ministry. Remember, Jesus is Emmanuel, the divine presence, who again promises to be with us until the end of the age. He is with us as we make decisions, study, pray, preach, baptize, and teach in his name. What Jesus wants from us is our "AVAILABILITY," not our "ABILITY." He used Peter, Paul, I name them, to spread his Gospel to the world. He will use you also, if you say "Yes" to him.

For me, each and every one of you is a blessing to our diocese and parish. Some are helping as members of the Parish staff, Pastoral Council, Finance Council, Choir, Forever Fit, Adventure Club, Parish House/Crosslines, Pregnancy Center, etc. Many of you generously support the mission of the Parish, Diocese, and Rome with your prayers and financial contributions through the Catholic Sharing Appeal, Holy Land, Propagation of the Faith, etc. Just imagine--without your talents/gifts, how would our Parish, Diocese, and Rome continue the Great Commission and Mission of Jesus Christ? As we celebrate this Solemnity of the Ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven, let us renew our commitment to his Great Commission we heard in the Gospel reading. St. John Paul II said it so beautifully: "NO believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples." (Redemptoris Missio no.3) Since we are heaven-bound people and not earth-bound, our work is incomplete until we meet Jesus in heaven where He will reward each one of us with the crown of salvation he has promised to his faithful ones.

Have a Happy and Blessed Solemnity of Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.