

**THE SOLEMNITY OF THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD  
(YEAR B)**

May 16, 2021

Acts 1:1–11 • Ephesians 1:17–23 • Mark 16:15–20

**I.**

I hadn't seen my parents in nearly a year-and-half because of the pandemic, until I was able to fly to Florida this past week to see them.

Even though we speak frequently by phone, it was nothing like the joy of seeing them in person, and the relief of knowing that they are well.

A year-and-half is a long interval; a lot happens during that time.

I'm sure many people have the experience I have: your relationship with your parents changes over time.

Like most people, I was eager to get out of the house to go to college, to do things my own way, and to be on my own.

And, of course, it was a joy to have my parents here when I was ordained a priest, because I could have never gotten that far in life without their support.

And then things shifted again when they retired.

Well, that 15 years ago, and things are different now.

They've gotten older, and I'm firmly in middle age.

The time I spend with them now I appreciate more than I ever have, even if, as many parents do, they sometimes treat me like I'm still 16 years old!

**II.**

As we know, life is constantly moving.

We have aphorisms that try to capture that reality.

*Pante re*: the ancient Greek phrase meaning, “all things flow,” sometimes colloquially translated as, “You can’t step in the same river twice” (because the water is constantly moving).

*Tempus fugit*: the Latin phrase meaning, “time flies.”

As life changes, we have to adapt to the evolving circumstances around us: family relationships, friendships, school, and work.

**III.**

Our relationship with God, and with the Church, is also meant to grow and develop.

Today’s feast of the Ascension commemorates a transition.

Jesus’ humanity—  
his human body and soul, which was joined to his divinity at the Incarnation—  
leaves earth.

Here, a brief theological explanation of the Ascension will be helpful.

In becoming human, the Son God remained divine;  
in other words, in coming to earth, he simultaneously remained in heaven,  
that is, joined to the Trinity.

But in being raised from the dead,  
the humanity of the Son of the God now entered heaven;  
it was joined to the Trinity, even as it remained on earth.

With the Ascension,  
Christ’s risen and glorified humanity leaves earth,  
so that the Son of God was now present in a different way.

Jesus intercedes for us before God;  
 he prepares a place for us in heaven;  
 he is present in the Church, for all times and in all places.

All of this marks a transition;  
 Christ's disciples, beginning with the apostles,  
 must now relate to him differently than before.

This is the meaning of the angel's admonition:  
 "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky?"

With the Ascension, the mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit continues,  
 but in a new way: in the Church.

Jesus' final words to his apostles are a commissioning:  
 "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature."

But Christ doesn't just command us to do something;  
 he also equips us for this mission.

As the culmination of his saving work,  
 he sends the Holy Spirit  
 (whose coming we will commemorate next Sunday on Pentecost):

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you,  
 and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem,  
 throughout Judea and Samaria,  
 and to the ends of the earth."

The Ascension and Pentecost are feasts—occasions of joy—  
 because they mark the fulfillment of God's plan.

[VCU graduates:

The Ascension is a kind of "graduation" for Jesus' first disciples.

Now they will carry on Jesus' mission, always with his help.

Your graduation is a proud moment for you and your families.

It's also a transition to a new stage of life:  
work or further education.

Your relationship with your families will change  
as you assume new responsibilities.

You can look forward to developing your skills further,  
and to one day being married and having children,  
or perhaps to serving the Church as a priest or religious.

As you enter this next stage of your life,  
remember that you are sent by God and commissioned by the Church.

As members of the lay faithful, have a definite mission:  
to consecrate the world to God,  
to make it a holier and better place by living out your Catholic faith.

The Second Vatican Council,  
that worldwide meeting of the whole Church that took place from 1962 to 1965  
in order to renew the Church for the sake of its mission in the modern world,  
put it like this:

“The laity... seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs  
and by ordering them according to the plan of God.  
They live in the world, that is,  
in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations.  
They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life...  
They are called there by God [so that] ...  
they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven.  
In this way they may make Christ known to others,  
especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity”  
(*Lumen gentium*, no. 31).

You've already navigated some transitions,  
such as being away from home,  
and how to adjust during the pandemic.

Society will not be the same after the pandemic;  
that's another transition unfolding before us.

A thought:

Everything we've done in the past  
is a preparation for what God needs us to do right now.

Jesus came into the world to save us.

He lived an ordinary life for 30 years in preparation for his public ministry.

His public ministry of two or three years  
was a preparation for his paschal mystery:  
his passion, death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit.

He did all of that so that we could continue his work.

You've accomplished much, and you have much to be proud of.

As the new period of your life begins, God blesses you,  
so that you may live your lives completely for him,  
and become Christ's witnesses to the ends of the earth.