

Ascension - C
Acts 1:1-11;
Ephesians 1:17-23;
Luke 24:46-53
Little Flower - 6/1/25

My Brothers and Sisters,

The parish, the parish staff, and I want to welcome all of our visitors especially those who have come to enjoy Summerfest25 with us.

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension of our Lord. Those of us who are older remember when the Solemnity of the Ascension was always celebrated on what was called Ascension Thursday, 40 days after Easter. In those days, Ascension Thursday was a holyday of obligation. Today's readings suggest two principal themes: Jesus' return to his Father and the mission of the apostles.

Today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians explains the significance of Jesus' return to the Father. We are told that God not only raised Jesus from the dead but also glorified him at his right hand. Jesus' glorification at the right hand of his Father was an integral part of his victory over sin, suffering, sickness, and death.

At the Last Supper, Jesus told his apostles, "*But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you*" [John 16:7]. The Advocate, of course, is the Holy Spirit. Jesus' return to the Father was also the necessary prerequisite for sending the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

In preparation for Pentecost, the Church asks us to pray all this week for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. I would suggest that we should pray for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit not only upon the Church but also upon the world. We are living in a very troubled world. The world—not just the Church—needs the gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. The world—not just the Church—also needs the fruits of the Holy Spirit: "charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, [and] chastity."

The second theme of today's Solemnity can be found in today's first reading. As the apostles watched Jesus ascend into the clouds, two angels appeared and said, "*Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven.*" In other words, Jesus entrusted the Church to them. They could not simply await his return. They were now responsible for continuing his mission and ministry in the world.

In both the first reading and the Gospel, Jesus told them that the Holy Spirit would come upon them and they would be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. In the Gospel, Jesus defined the core Christian message: "*Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*"

The Church calls this core Christian message kerygma, i.e., the initial and essential proclamation of the Gospel. Pope John Paul II captured the essence of the kerygma: "The subject of proclamation is Christ who was crucified, died, and is risen: through him is accomplished our full and authentic liberation from evil, sin and death; through him God bestows 'new life' that is divine and eternal" [*Redemptoris Missio*, 44]. In other words, through the kerygma, people encounter the person of Jesus Christ.

My brothers and sisters, although the Solemnity of the Ascension marks Jesus' spatial and experiential separation from the apostles, theologian Fr. Jean Galot reminds us that when Christ returns in glory, the great revelation will be that he has been with us all along.