

Father Tom's Homily: Ascension of the Lord

Traditionally, the Feast of the Ascension, a holy day of obligation, is celebrated 40 days after Easter, on Ascension. Whether it is celebrated on Thursday or Sunday, the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ is essential for our daily Christian journey. It is so important that, we profess our faith in the Lord's Ascension every Sunday in the Creed, "He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father." Pope Benedict preached with clarity; that though Jesus is with the Father he has not gone away, but remains close to us. He is no longer in one particular place in the world as he had been before the ascension. Now in through his power over space, Jesus is present and accessible to all throughout history and in every place. From his sanctuary in heaven, as the letter to the Hebrews puts it, Jesus is able to be in every tabernacle in the world, he is able to dwell with the Father and the Holy Spirit in every baptized soul. By going to his Father, he is able to walk with each of us in the dark valleys.

I recall how I had been able to visit a dying parishioner in her final hours. She was in really good spirits, she was joking how in the months of her illness, her husband had to learn many of the traditional wifely duties; cooking, cleaning, laundry, to name a few. I was struck how, not only was she in good humour, despite the medical tubes in her arms and the physical suffering from her late stage cancer, she was facing the inevitable with a sort of fearlessness. Though there was pain, both physical and emotional, especially the pain of being separated from her loved ones, I was really struck by her fearlessness. On the final day when I was to bring Jesus to her in the Eucharist and the sacrament of anointing - to bring her the comfort that comes from God, I found that, indeed, God was already there. It is because of the Ascension, Jesus is present and accessible to all throughout history and in every place. The Catechism puts it, "having entered the sanctuary of heaven once and for all, Jesus Christ, intercedes constantly intercedes for us as the mediator who assures us of the permanent outpouring of the Holy Spirit." God was always there, in that hospital room in an outpouring of comfort; God was

there granting her fearlessness; preparing her soul to meet Him, and it was very beautiful to witness the peacefulness and calmness within her. There are many reasons why we fear death: We fear the unknown; We fear facing God, who will judge our souls, to whom we will have to give an account of our lives; We fear the pain involved in dying; We fear for the well-being of loved-ones left behind.

Through faith, a Christian faces death with fearlessness. The Christian faces God, with trust, for we know that he loved us so much that he sent his Son to make the ultimate Sacrifice, almost aligning to the same sacrifice of a mother and father – the ultimate sacrifice of our loving parents. On the Fifth Sunday of Easter we celebrated Mother's Day, I am particularly grateful in those many ways that our Mothers have been the other Christ's to us. We are indebted to our mothers' gift of life through childbirth, and the many other sacrifices that go unnoticed and unappreciated. When parents pour out their love for their children, they are cooperating with the grace of God.

The Catholic Church is not simply a social club whose members share similar ideas and values. The Catholic Church is the presence of Christ on earth. You and I are called to be the hands and feet of Christ, bringing Christ to other through the faith we profess and practice in our every-day lives. So much so, that the individual Christian is called to be "Alter Christus", which is Latin for, "Another Christ." Pope Francis recently preached that The Ascension of Jesus into heaven acquaints us with this deeply consoling reality on our journey: In Christ, our humanity was taken to God. Christ opened the path to us. He is like a roped guide climbing a mountain who, on reaching the summit, pulls us up to Him and leads us to God. If we entrust our life to him, if we let ourselves be guided by him, we are certain to be in safe hands, in the hands of our Saviour, of our Advocate. When Jesus ascended into heaven, he entrusted his mission to his disciples. You and I have a mission, we have a purpose to bring the message of the Risen Christ to our brothers and sisters. May we be faithful to all of our divine mission of bringing forth His kingdom of peace and justice as we surrender everything to Him.