

Ascension Sunday

Today's **gospel** tells us that, with his return to the Father, Jesus completed his mission on earth. But just before his Ascension, he entrusted to his disciples the mission of preaching and evangelizing the whole world by bearing witness to him through their lives. The ascended Jesus is still with us because of his promise, "I am with you always; yes, to the end of time." He is with us at all times and in all places, releasing a new spiritual energy upon the earth, the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew, Mark and Acts record Jesus' last words differently: "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mark.16:15). All, however, are in agreement that (a) Jesus gave his disciples a mission of bearing witness to him by preaching and (b) He assured them of the divine assistance of the Holy Spirit in the carrying out of this mission.

WHERE is Christ? Seated at the Right Hand of God the Father Almighty. These words are a figure of speech; for he who sits at the right hand is considered to occupy the most honourable place. Being seated there means in possession of royal and supreme power in glory with the Father.

HOW did Jesus ascend? He ascended by His own power. Whereas Elijah was carried to heaven in a fiery chariot and Mary was assumed. Christ ascended into heaven as God and Man.

WHY did Jesus ascend?

- 1). He ascended because His mission was finished and His glorious body warranted a place of glory.
- 2). He ascended to possess the kingdom which He had merited by His blood.
- 3). He ascended to prove that His kingdom is not of this world. For the kingdoms of this world are earthly and transient, and are based upon wealth and the power of the flesh; but the kingdom of Christ is not.
- 4). He also ascended into heaven in order to teach us to follow Him in mind and heart. Though we dwell on earth, we should desire heaven as pilgrims hoping to be numbered among his saints forever.

In order that we may arrive where he is we need the godly or theological virtue of hope. It is a supernatural virtue of the will. It needs to be exercised, like muscles in the body need movement lest they wither, so too hope needs to be sought. How often do we make acts of hope? How often do we pray to be filled with hope?

This essential virtue rests on two other virtues: humility and magnanimity or big heartedness. As a bridge rests on pillars these virtues are the pillars or support of hope. Hope requires that we be humble and generous. If we don't pursue them we can be overcome by the enemies of hope which are despair & presumption – depression and arrogance.

Hope for heaven needs us to be tuned into reality and not virtual reality regarding heaven. **Heaven is not playing harps! In the words of C.S Lewis in Mere Christianity we read:** "All the scriptural imagery (harps, crowns gold, etc.) is, of course, a merely symbolic attempt to express the inexpressible. Musical instruments are mentioned because for many people music is the thing known in the present life which most strongly suggests ecstasy and infinity. Crowns are mentioned to suggest the fact that those who are united with God in eternity share His splendour and power and joy. Gold is mentioned to suggest the timelessness of Heaven (gold does not rust) and the preciousness of it."

One saint who epitomized great hope in great adversity was Saint Rita – a wife, mother, widow, religious and mystic. Rita was born in the year 1381 near Cascia, Italy. As a young girl Rita frequently visited the convent of the Augustinian Nuns in Cascia and dreamed of one day joining their community. Her parents, however, had promised her in marriage, according to the custom of the day, to Paolo Mancini, a good man of strong and impetuous character. Rita accepted her parents'

decision, resolved to see this as God's will for her.

The young couple soon had twin boys. Rita found herself occupied with the typical concerns of a wife, mother, and homemaker. As a minor official of the town, her husband, Paul often found himself drawn into the conflict, and one day was returning home from work when he was ambushed and killed. Her two teenage sons, moved by the unwritten law of the "vendetta," would seek to avenge their father's death. Rita's only recourse was to prayer and persuasion. As it happened, the death of both boys from natural causes a short time later removed them from physical and spiritual danger. Despite her great burden she could still thank God that they had died in peace.

Now alone in the world and without family responsibilities, but Rita's request for admission was denied. After much prayer and hope at the age of thirty-six Rita pledged to follow the ancient Rule of Saint Augustine. For the next forty years she gave herself wholeheartedly to prayer and works of charity, striving especially to preserve peace and harmony among the citizens of Cascia. One day when she was about sixty years of age, she was meditating before an image of Christ crucified, as she was long accustomed to doing. Suddenly a small wound appeared on her forehead, as though a thorn from the crown that encircled Christ's head had loosed itself and penetrated her own flesh. For the next fifteen years she bore this wound for the spiritual well being of others. During the last four years of her life Rita was confined to bed and was able to eat so little that she was practically sustained on Holy Communion alone. She was, nevertheless, an inspiration to her sisters in religion and to all who came to visit her, by her patience and joyful disposition despite her great suffering.