

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Gospel this weekend is preparing us for the Ascension of the Lord. We celebrate this Holy Day of Obligation this coming Thursday, May 30<sup>th</sup> (with Masses at 8am, 10am and 7pm). This happens forty days after the Resurrection and prepares us for the Solemnity of Pentecost – the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. After Pentecost, we leave the Easter Season and enter again into Ordinary Time. This is important to note that Easter lasts fifty days. Lent may seem long (forty days) with all of its fasting and penance, but the Church wants us to know that our celebrations are longer than our penance!

Oh yeah, back to the Ascension. In this event, Jesus brings His full humanity into Heaven. He already exists there in His divinity (His “God-ness”), but also brings His humanity – body and soul. This is important to note – the Church has constantly taught that once the Word of God, the Eternal Logos, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, was united to human nature at the Annunciation (March 25, when the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and asked if she would become the Mother of God, and she, in her freedom, said “Let it be done unto me according to your word” [Luke 1:38], and He was conceived in her womb), He will NEVER be separated from it again.

Do you get this? Our humanity now has the exceptionally high dignity of forever being united, in the person of Jesus, with the God-head. He will never, never, never separate Himself from His humanity. The Resurrection is a sign of this, as Jesus is bodily raised from the dead. The Ascension also points to this, as His body is taken into Heaven.

Someone recently was sharing with me that some Catholics with whom he was speaking were discussing where the body of Jesus is now. They were unsure and claimed that nobody knew. Yet, the Scriptures tell us that His body is in Heaven. We will NOT find the body of Christ in some undiscovered tomb somewhere; it is in Heaven.

This weekend, we hear from the “Last Supper Discourse,” as John recalls how Jesus shared many teachings before He died. One such teaching was that Jesus was going to go away, but that He would send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit. Have you ever wondered why Jesus had to leave us, had to ascend into Heaven? This is it – so He could send us the Holy Spirit.

But why is the Holy Spirit important in our lives? The Holy Spirit is the union between the Father and Son – the very love of Father and Son, so real, that He is a person. This person comes to us so that we can have union with God. In fact, if the Holy Spirit had not come to us, all that Jesus did would have just been a piece of history. It is the Holy Spirit who takes what Jesus did on the Cross and makes it real for our souls. It is the Holy Spirit who inhabits the Sacred Scriptures so that when we read, they speak to our lives here and now, today, not just words from 2000-3000 years ago. It is the Holy Spirit who unites us to the very Heart of God.

In fact, as mentioned above, the Holy Spirit is called the Advocate. This is such an important name because of the other guy. The Devil is called “Satan,” and “satan” means “the accuser.” He stands accusing us – accusing us of our sins, of our failings, of our unworthiness. It is the Holy Spirit who stands guarding us, defending us, with the answer to the accusation – that Jesus’ Blood covers us here and now, today, washing away our sins, and *making* us worthy in the sight of God.

As we prepare this week to celebrate the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven, let us rejoice that Jesus has united Himself so closely – and permanently – to our humanity, that He has raised our human dignity to the heights of union with God. Let us pray for a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our lives, in our families, in our parish, in our church, in our world, so that we may experience the close intimacy of God’s love for us.