

Relationship with GOD

More than Just SUNDAY

Why are you standing there? Go!



Each year the Church celebrates Jesus' Ascension into heaven and his exaltation at the Father's right hand. The observance traditionally takes place 40 days after his resurrection. In a handful of dioceses in the United States, this significant 40-day mark still remains. In other dioceses, bishops have chosen to move the Solemnity of the Ascension to the following Sunday. Such is the case in the dioceses in Wisconsin, when the Ascension in 2019 will fall on Sunday, June 2.

Even though we will celebrate Ascension on a Sunday, we need to stay intently focused on this rather key moment in Christ's saving work. Our Catechism's *Compendium* sums up Christ's life-work neatly when it writes that "The Paschal Mystery of Jesus, which comprises his passion, death, resurrection, and glorification [that is, ascension], stands at the center of the Christian faith..." (112).

So, while we are most familiar with Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection at the Triduum, we find that his Ascension can seem detached some 40 days—or 43 days—out from Easter. Yet the Ascension is the completion, perfection, and exclamation point on Jesus' saving work for us. We can't

let this important feast pass over without notice!

St. Matthew records Jesus' Ascension in these words: "The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, 'All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age'" (28:16-20).

The Acts of the Apostles begins "the rest of the story," as the late radio personality Paul Harvey would have put it. As St. Luke recounts: "When Jesus had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight. While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. They 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.' Then they returned to Jerusalem..." (1:9-12).

Apart from the annual observance of the Ascension and the Paschal Mystery, the weekly (and even daily) remembrance of that

same mystery takes place at every celebration of the Church's greatest prayer—the Mass. Can you hear how the Ascension passages are prayed at the concluding texts of the Mass? Jesus gives the great commission to "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," only to have angelic witnesses tell them to stop "standing there looking at the sky." At Mass, the priest blesses us in the name of "the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" before the deacon commands to "Go and announce the gospel of the Lord."

Every Mass celebrates "the memorial of the blessed Passion, the Resurrection from the dead, and the glorious Ascension into heaven" (Eucharistic Prayer I) and then commissions us, Jesus' disciples, to go out and transform the world.

Therefore, it is fitting that we should pray the Opening Prayer for the Vigil of the Ascension before, during, and after this magnificent mystery: "O God, whose Son today ascended to the heavens as the Apostles looked on, grant, we pray, that, in accordance with his promise, we may be worthy for him to live with us always on earth, and we with him in heaven." Amen!

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