

Ascension Thursday Reflection Mark 15: 16-20

- If you look up the definition of the word “Ascension” this is what you will find: “ The act of rising to an important position or higher level”. The word Ascension has as its root the word “Ascend”, which means to climb, to takeoff, soar, arise.
- Today is Ascension Thursday. Jesus ascends to heaven. He goes home. Jesus rises to an important position.
- Sometimes I think of this image of Jesus arriving back in heaven. Waiting to greet Him is God the Father, some prophets and a few saints. And Jesus flops down on His favorite chair and says “ Wow, its good to be home. Those people down there can be crazy. Many of them didn’t believe a word I said. One of my best friends turned on me. And did you see how they just treated me in Jerusalem? I’m glad to be back here. So where’s the TV remote”.
- Fortunately for us that’s not what happened at Jesus ascension. Jesus was not going home and leaving us alone. *Jesus didn’t ascend to escape us*. He’s not separating Himself from humanity the way we can separate ourselves from work or school at the end of a bad day.
- In fact if we look closely at two Gospel readings, last Sunday’s Gospel and today’s Gospel, we get to see what Jesus’ ascension is all about.
- Last Sunday we heard Jesus tell us things like: “ I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” and “ You are in me and I in you”. These are not the words of someone about to leave us alone, are they?
- Last Sunday we heard the first part of the Ascension message. We were told Jesus’ ascension is not an end at all. It is an ongoing relationship to be lived out in an all-new way. In prayer, in Eucharist, in our loving relationships with others – He is present in all of these.
- Today’s Gospel gives us the second part of the Ascension message. We are told that *the Ascension is not a leaving - it is a sending*. We are sent to be Jesus’ disciples in this world. Sent with the full knowledge that Jesus is present, we are never alone!! God loves us and is intimately involved in our lives. Each of us is called to discipleship, in one form or another.

- We are sent to teach others what Jesus taught us: *Love God with all your heart and love each other.* And what a great honor this is: To be chosen by God, you and me, to bring His love, His presence to other people.
- We are called to Ascend. Called to rise to that higher level as “Children of God”. But our job does not stop there.
- We are called to help each other to Ascend. Called to help each other arise and soar as children of God. We are called to help each other rise and to remember when one of us rises we all rise!!
- I remember the story of a young catechist teaching 7th grade religious education classes. One particular class had a troubled young person to whom the catechist made an extra effort to pay attention.
- Later in her life this catechist experienced a serious medical condition that required her to visit a medical specialist. When the doctor entered the examining room a smile came across his face. “Do you remember me?” the doctor asked. The woman apologized for not having a recollection. The doctor continued: “You were my 7th grade religion teacher. I will never forget the day you told me I could be anything I dreamed to be. And that God loved me. It really started me thinking and dreaming.”
- When one of us rises, we all rise.
- In our first reading today, we see Jesus' Apostles looking up in amazement as “he was lifted up before their eyes, and a cloud took him out of their sight” (Acts 1: 1-11).
- Suddenly two men dressed in white say to them “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up to heaven? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, shall come in the same way as you have seen him going up to heaven”.
- In other words, "Stop standing around gawking, and wondering when Christ might come back, and get busy with what He wants you to do!" And that applies to *all of us* as well, each in our own ways. We are called to help each other Ascend.
- There is a particular section of today’s Gospel that puts some specifics on how we are to do that. It is found in these sentences: *“These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents with their hands,*

and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

- We are called to lift each other up, help each other ascend.
- We are called to drive out the demons of loneliness, doubt, poverty, hopelessness and despair.
- We are called to speak a new language. The language of kindness, love and encouragement.
- We are called to be brave in the face of difficult things and not to be afraid to handle those serpents, facing them head on and knowing that if we trust in the Lord He will protect us and give us the strength.
- We are called to reach out and touch the lives of others who are suffering. Those suffering from physical illnesses, depression, anxiety. We are called to be present to them. Letting them know they matter. Letting them know God loves them and is there for them.
- Today we celebrate Jesus' ascension into heaven and His call to us to ascend with Him. When one of us rises, we all rise!

God bless you!!!