

Ascension Sunday 2018

Happy Mother's Day!

If you are visiting St. John Nepomuk for Mother's Day, then I wish you a happy and blessed day with family and friends.

The Magnificat devotional said today that Mothers are always...witnesses of tenderness, dedication, and moral strength.

And Pope Francis said,

Dearest mothers, thank you, thank you for what you are in your family and for what you give to the Church and the world. general audience, Jan. 7, 2015

Mothers of all kinds are a gift.

Isn't it amazing how much smarter our mothers get when we get older.

As someone wisely once noted that our sentiments and appreciation evolve with age-

At 3 years "Mommy I love you.

At 10 years "Mom whatever"

At 16 years "Mom you're so annoying."

At 18 years "I'm leaving this house".

At 25 years "Mom you were right".

At 50 years " I don't want to lose my Mom.

At 70 years " I would give up everything to have my mom here with me. "

The good news is, for Christians, we can have our mom, and our dad, and our loved ones with us for all eternity. This life is very brief, but the next life, as St. Therese the Little Flower said, is one eternal day.

Which is why on this day, we celebrate the Ascension of Christ entering into the one eternal day.

Jesus says I'm going to my Father's house to prepare a place for you.

Of course A house in heaven is not a structure but an extended family, a lineage where all baptized believers live.

As Pope Benedict once said, heaven is not a place, heaven is a person and that person is Jesus Christ.

So the Ascension of Jesus is a monumental event for Christians.

So just to clarify, Jesus was not the only one who entered into heaven, body and soul, after living on earth.

Jesus' mother Mary, who is our spiritual mother, and the first disciple, also entered heaven at the end of her life on earth, which we call the Assumption of Mary, but there is a big difference between the Ascension of Jesus and the Assumption of Mary.

Mary was preserved from sin by a special grace, prevenient grace, a preventative-from-sin kind of grace, and so at the end of her life on earth she was assumed or drawn into heaven, not by her own will or power, but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As the Poet William Wordsworth said, "she is our tainted nature's solitary boast."

So here is a human person who is physically and spiritually, both body and soul, in heaven, in the presence of God.

That's what the mural in Assumption chapel portrays. Mary receiving her crown of victory in the presence of the Holy Trinity.

This was God's original plan for all of us before the fall of Adam, before original sin.

Now When we die, only our soul will go to heaven until the second coming of Jesus and the final judgement.

This is one reason why the Church says that we are to respect and revere the human person even after death.

The body should be treated with dignity and laid to rest in a grave or mausoleum or columbarium if it's a cremation, and the priest or deacon will bless the grave as a place for our body to rest until Christ returns.

That's why the Church says the remains must remain together in a blessed place and not on a fireplace mantle in the house, or not stored on a shelf in a funeral home or not be scattered over a favorite hillside or beach.

The Body is to be treated with a sacred dignity until Christ returns.

So Mary the Mother of Jesus was Assumed into heaven by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus on the other hand Ascended into heaven on His own power. And the reason He did is because He was working. Jesus had a big job to get done.

Actually he had several jobs to accomplish and the the first one according to St. Paul was to equip each of us with a special skill set.

"But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. "

So Jesus has given each of us a gift by His grace for us to use during this life on earth to be used to continue His work.

If someone gave you something really special or beautiful what would you do with it?

I think old classic cars are beautiful. If someone gave me a fully restored 1929 Buick, I could do two things. I could keep it locked up in the garage and go admire it every once in a while, and go start it up once in a while, to listen to its engine, and then go back into the house until the next week or year. That's not a very good use of the gift.

But if I used it in parades, loaned it out for weddings and gave people rides, then it would be a gift that was being shared.

So Jesus gives each of us a gift before he ascends, but it's for us to use for His church, we can't just keep it to ourselves.

Then Paul goes on to explain that:

He ascended on high and took prisoners captive; he gave gifts to men. What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended into the lower regions of the earth?

The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things."

So before Jesus Ascended He descended. The moment his human body died on the cross He went directly to the place of the dead, Hades, in Greek, Sheol in Hebrew, and collected the righteous, all those who lived before Jesus but who lived a virtuous and obedient life or a life listening to God and doing God's will instead of their own.

That would include folks like Moses, he prophets, maybe Adam and Eve?
It doesn't say specifically who, but He says, prisoners who were captive in death, Jesus went there first to save them.

To outsiders or non-Christians it may have looked like Jesus was dead in a dark tomb, but He was busy working, collecting souls to take to heaven.

And now they are with Him on their way to the one eternal day.

And so Jesus starts to put into place His succession plan.

Every large corporation or institution has a succession plan.

When the CEO of a company retires or resigns they have a plan in place to replace them.

That way there are no gaps in between leadership.

There is a smooth transition and everyone knows what to do during the regime change.

So Jesus has this same plan in place for His new kingdom.

He has spent 3 years training, forming and educating a small elite group of men.

He has walked with them through thick and thin, fear and doubt but now they are ready to take the reins and move this wagon train forward.

He will still be the CEO. He's still in charge and calling the shots but his team is about to be infused with the Limitless pill called the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is removing Himself from the picture so they won't be dependent on Him but they still have to trust in Him.

Jesus is going to now lead from behind so they can flourish and thrive.

And do they ever. They become fearless against all odds.

They give themselves completely to the cause, to the mission. They couldn't be any more "all in" at this point.

Of course it took them a few minutes to realize what just happened.

The Angels that were there finally said, what are you standing here starring at?

Get to work! Get busy! You all have a job to do now.

That's how it all started. The succession plan was put into place and started to roll out that very day.

Next week is Pentecost. 50 days after the resurrection. The plan is being rolled out to all Christians. It's the Same Holy Spirit and same organization chart.

It's when everyone else receives their gift from Jesus.

So that's THE plan. What's your plan?

Maybe we should ask ourselves first, Lord what is my gift and then how do you want me to use it?

How did our mothers pass on to us the gift of faith?

Maybe we could show them our thanks and gratitude by using our gifts and do the same.

