

Ascension of the Lord

Homily: Fr. Shijo George

Pastor – Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Victoria, BC, Canada

The Feast of the Ascension of the Lord invites us into one of the most beautiful and profound mysteries of our faith. In the Gospel (Matthew 28:16 - 20), the disciples gathered on the mountain in Galilee where Jesus had directed them. The Gospel tells us something deeply human and deeply consoling: “When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted.” Even before the Risen Christ, even after witnessing the Resurrection, there was still fear, uncertainty, and doubt in the hearts of the disciples. Yet, Jesus did not reject them. He does not wait for perfect faith. Instead, he entrusts them with the mission of the Kingdom. That is the mystery of divine grace: God works through fragile human beings. The Ascension is not the story of Jesus abandoning the world; it is the revelation of Christ remaining present in a new and deeper way.

Before ascending, Jesus declares: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Then, he gives the Church her mission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” The Gospel moves from worship to mission; from the mountain to the nations; from fear to proclamation.

At the heart of this Gospel is the final promise of Jesus: “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” These are not merely comforting words. Theologically, they reveal the abiding presence of Christ in the life of the Church and in the heart of every believer. The Ascension does not mean absence. Christ who ascends is the same Christ who remains. Through the Holy Spirit, he continues to dwell among his people: in the Scriptures, in the sacraments, in the Eucharist, in the suffering, in the poor, and in the communion of the Church.



The great theologians of the Church contemplated this mystery deeply. St. Augustine of Hippo cried out in his book, *Confessions*: “You were within me while I was outside.” Augustine reminds us that God is never far away. Often, it is we who are distracted, wandering outside ourselves, and searching for meaning in places where Christ is not. The Risen Lord dwells intimately within the human soul.

St. Thomas Aquinas emphasized the sacramental presence of Christ, especially in the Eucharist. The Church teaches in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 1373 and 1374, that Christ is present in many ways: in his Word, in the assembly, in the minister, and above all in the Eucharist where he is present in a “true, real, and substantial manner.” The Eucharist is not simply a symbol of Christ’s love; it is Christ himself, living and glorious among us. The modern theologian, Karl Rahner, reflected on the Church as the continuing presence of Christ in history. The mission entrusted to the disciples on the mountain continues today through the Church. Every baptized person becomes a witness to the presence of the Risen Lord in the world.

This mystery became profoundly real in the life of François-Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuận. During thirteen years of imprisonment, much of which was in solitary confinement, he discovered that Christ’s presence could never be taken away. In the darkness of prison, he secretly celebrated the Eucharist with a few drops of wine and crumbs of bread. He wrote: “If you have lost everything but still have the Blessed Sacrament, you actually still have everything, because you have the Lord of heaven present here on earth.” In another moment of deep suffering, he prayed: “I am happy here, in this cell... because You are here with me.” His prison became a sanctuary because Christ was there.

Brothers and sisters, this is the hope of the Ascension. Christ is not distant from human suffering. He is present in the struggles of ordinary people: in illness,

loneliness, financial burdens, broken relationships, failures, disappointments, and silent tears. Sometimes we expect dramatic miracles, but often the presence of Jesus comes quietly: in the strength to endure another day, in the kindness of a friend, in the embrace of family, in the peace that arrives unexpectedly during prayer, in the grace to forgive, and in the Eucharist received with faith.

Life can often feel like a ship caught in a violent storm. The winds of suffering, fear, uncertainty, and despair can shake us deeply. Yet the Christian life calls us to keep our anchor fixed in Christ. Even when we cannot see the horizon, even when the waves rise against us, we trust that the Lord remains in the boat with us. The Ascension teaches us not that Jesus has left the ship, but that he now guides it in a deeper and mysterious way.

The disciples who stood on that mountain in Galilee were not perfect saints. They were wounded, uncertain, and afraid. Yet Christ entrusted them with the mission of transforming the world because the mission ultimately depends not on human strength, but on Divine Presence. “I am with you always.” That promise sustained the apostles, strengthened the martyrs, comforted the saints, and continues to sustain the Church today.

As we celebrate this Feast of the Ascension, let us ask for the grace to recognize the living presence of Christ in our daily lives. May we encounter him in the Eucharist, hear him in the Scriptures, discover him in the poor and suffering, and trust him in every storm of life. May our hearts be filled with the certainty that the Risen Lord who ascended into heaven has never abandoned his people, but remains with us always; until the end of the age.