

## The Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord - Well, what are we supposed to do, now that he's gone?

May 24, 2020.

In the 1994 popular film "**Forrest Gump**," story, when Forrest is feeling rejected by the people he loves, he gets an urge to run. So he jogs across the yard, and doesn't stop. In fact, when he gets to the ocean and runs out of roads, he just turns around and runs the other way. He gets on national news. When asked why he's running - "*World peace? Women's rights?*" - he answers, "*I'm just running.*" Unintentionally, he sparks a huge national following. The humorous yet meaningful event ends his journey in the middle of a desert. Forrest stops, longhaired and long bearded, and turns around. The handful of sweaty joggers following him shush each other: "*Quiet, he's gonna say somethin'.*" "*I'm kinda' tired,*" he says, "*I think I'll go home now.*" Forrest walks through the small and silent crowd becoming smaller and smaller. One of his followers yells after him, "**Well, what are we supposed to do?**"

Jesus is parting again today! **Well, what are we supposed to do?** Have you ever thought of why Jesus returned to heaven after his resurrection rather than just staying here on earth? He told his followers, including us, that it was better for him to leave because: "**...it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.**" (John 16:7). But how could the Advocate (Holy Spirit) be better than having Jesus in the flesh? In John 14, Jesus explains: "**This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.**"

When Jesus was physically present on earth, he was limited to one location—to wherever his physical body was at the time. But the Holy Spirit can be everywhere. He is in all of Jesus' followers, helping us all at the same time. One of the most important things we can learn in life is how to be led by the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:14 says, "**For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.**" If we are children of God, the Holy Spirit will guide and lead us. When we start the Christian life, being baptized, we're probably not very good at being led by the Spirit. We don't know his voice. But as our relationship with the Lord grows through prayers, sacraments, our faith increases, we will start to recognize his voice, his presence and know where he is leading us. We are all looking for the answers to life's deepest questions: what's next. But since our thirst for truth and happiness is infinite (because that's how God made us), no finite worldly thing can satisfy us. Forrest's mindless followers personified that thirst for meaning. The things of this world (money, fame, politics, pleasure) cannot provide any meaning; eventually, we get tired of them; they let us down. Only Christ is infinite goodness, power, and wisdom; only he is "**the Way, the Truth, and the Life**" that we are searching for.

**St. Therese of the Child Jesus, Theresa of Lisieux**, in her 24 years of life lived in the full example of Children of God. Therese was born to a devout family. When she was four, her mother died of breast cancer. On Christmas of 1886, when she was 13, Therese felt a deep complete conversion. She was absolutely convinced that she had to give her life for Christ. She wanted to devote herself to praying for others. While making a pilgrimage to Rome with the family the next year, Therese met Pope Leo XIII and begged him to allow the Discalced Carmelite Nuns to relax the rule to allow her to enter the convent before she turned 16. She won and was accepted in the Lisieux convent. Therese was only a Carmelite for nine years till she died of tuberculosis at age 24 in 1897. During these nine years, she was a powerhouse of prayer. She prayed for priests. Her determination to care for the spiritual lives of priests has resulted in her being named the **patroness of vocations**. Therese also prayed for the missions. She was overwhelmed by the thought that millions would die without having the opportunity to learn about Jesus. She never left the convent, but she is also recognized as a

**patroness of foreign missions.** *She is called the Little Flower because her life and her prayers filled the world with the fragrance of God's love.* Therese wrote about the "Little Way" of doing all things, even the smallest thing, for the glory of God. Her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul* is one of the great spiritual works of the Church, so much so that in 1997 she was named a **Doctor of the Church**. She has spent her last eighteen months in Carmel in **a night of faith**, wrote of her own experience of the dark night. Yes, even saints have their spiritual dark night. Therese's dark night derived from doubt of the existence of eternity. She painfully suffered through this prolonged period, even declaring to her fellow nuns: *"If you only knew what darkness I am plunged into."* She didn't give in but rather prevailed by deepening her relationship with the Lord and of her Catholic faith through prayer.

Today the Church is inviting us to reflect on this great mystery of our faith, Christ's ascension into heaven. As we do so, we should feel our confidence in God renewed and strengthened. Jesus is ruling history right now. None of the difficulties, injustices, and problems that we face as individuals, families, and societies is outside of his knowledge or power. He is at work in all things, even if it is sometimes hard for us to see exactly how. As this Sunday's Mass prayers remind us: **"Christ, the mediator between God and man, judge of the world and Lord of all, has passed beyond our sight, not to abandon us but to be our hope"**. (Preface for Ascension I). How can we express this hope, this confidence in God? St Ignatius of Loyola says that ***we should pray as if everything depended upon God, and work as if everything depended on us***. Each of us has projects, dreams, goals, problems, and challenges in our lives. This week, encouraged and strengthened by Christ's ascension into heaven, let's pray each morning for God to send his grace and blessing upon them. And then, trusting that God will always do his part, let's roll up our sleeves and do our part. We should pray for a sick relative to be comforted and get well, but we should also go and visit them, bringing them flowers, reading to them, encouraging them... When Jesus ascended into heaven, he entrusted his mission to His Church, us. That mission, to follow Christ and help others do the same, is still in full swing today. It's in our hands, and if to fulfill our part we do our best to love and serve, surely God will do the rest.