

After the Gospel was read, the Easter candle was extinguished. It means the Risen Christ, represented by the candle during the Easter season, has ascended to the Father. After the Easter candle is extinguished, the Mass moves on to the Liturgy of the Holy Eucharist where the Risen Christ is really present under the sacramental signs of bread and wine.

Today is the day when our Catholic Church invites us to celebrate the Ascension of Jesus into heaven. It is a day of great joy in our Church, as we heard the Responsorial Psalm say to us: *“Clap your hands, all you people, shout to God with loud songs of joy.”* These words from Psalm 47 hint at the incredible joy that we experience deep within our hearts today.

In the First Reading and in the Gospel, St. Luke writes about Jesus’ Ascension being visible as He rose into the sky forty days after His Resurrection. Jesus is lifted up to where God dwells in heaven. The cloud is a symbol of the Divine and refers to the coming of the Son of Man at the end of time on *“a cloud with power and great glory”* (Luke 21:27).

At the Ascension, Jesus leaves His Apostles in such a dramatic way to show them, and us, that the time of His public appearances is over until His return in glory. From now on, we will know Jesus in His Catholic Church, in the Holy Sacrifice of the Holy Mass, and in the Sacraments. This is how Jesus has come to all of us.

Sometimes it’s hard for us to grasp the importance of Jesus’ Ascension. It’s helpful if we use an analogy. Consider Jesus’ Ascension to be a bridge. One end of the bridge is here on earth, where fallen human beings like us are struggling to find our way to the happiness and eternal life we were created for. The other end of the bridge is located in heaven, in the full presence of God, where happiness and eternal life are fully experienced.

Now, Jesus built this bridge for us to cross when He suffered for our sake on the Cross. He fixed one end of the bridge firmly here on earth where He established His Catholic Church and He fixed the other end of the bridge firmly in heaven by ascending to where He sits at His Father’s right hand. Without Jesus’ Ascension, the bridge would

have remained unfinished. In other words, Jesus is truly present in heaven, with His resurrected, glorified Body.

But Jesus is also still fully present here on earth in His Catholic Church that He established, and through the Sacraments of our Church, which are administered by His priests through the power of the Holy Spirit. We start on the bridge with the Sacrament of Baptism to be sealed as sons and daughters of God. In our Baptism we join the family of God and we form a community in Christ's living Catholic Church.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation fixes the potholes of sins we make while we are crossing the bridge. The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist feeds us with Jesus Body and Blood as we continue on our journey. Then we are anointed with the Sacrament of Confirmation to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit to guide us and lead us across the bridge. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick helps us and strengthens us when we are sick or suffering as we journey across the bridge on our way to the heavenly homeland.

Furthermore, the bridge appears in the Mass since *"the Mass is Heaven on earth"* (Book of Revelation). This truth of our faith is symbolically proclaimed every time Mass is celebrated. When the priest proclaims the Word of God, he is representing God as God revealed Himself through His Word in the Old Testament. At the Offertory, the priest comes forward to receive the people's offerings, just as Christ came from heaven, taking to Himself our human nature through His Incarnation.

Then the priest brings our gifts to the altar, gifts which represent our life, sufferings, and works, where he places them on the sacrificial altar offering them to God on our behalf. Therefore, Our Lord's unique priesthood is that He has extended the bridge of our salvation from His Church on earth to heaven. He alone has done this, because He alone rose from the dead and ascended into heaven.

The point of Jesus' Ascension for us is that to meet the Risen Christ today, we do not have to go to Jerusalem, Bethany, the Upper Room or the Mount of Olives. We have only to attend the celebration of the Mass and partake of the Holy Eucharist. Jesus is *fully present* in the Sacred Mass, through His ordained priests, to lead us in our worship of God the Father. The Ascension means that Jesus is gone from our sight but not from our life.

The final words of Jesus to the Apostles are brief and to the point, *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* No longer confined to a bodily presence, Jesus is with His Apostles and with us in a new way, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles, under the influence of the Holy Spirit and with His guidance, begin to act on the commission they have received from Jesus to spread the Good News to all nations.

The Ascension assures us that Jesus does not leave us orphans because He has given us His Holy Spirit to lead us. In other words, the Ascension is not about Christ’s absence but about the new, spiritual presence of Christ to all of us, wherever we are, through the Holy Spirit. Now, the Risen Jesus is as close to each of us as the beating of our heart.

The Ascension of Jesus Christ shows us where our real destiny lies. We are created on earth but we are not destined to remain on earth. Everything that happens to us here on earth can be a path to glory in heaven. If we are faithful to Christ, we too will come into the glory of the Father with Jesus. Where Jesus has gone, we hope to someday follow. The Ascension shows that our real home is with God in Heaven. St. Augustine wrote, *“You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”*

Before Jesus is taken up into heaven, He raises His hands and blesses His Apostles. At the Concluding Rite of the Mass, the priest, in the person of Christ, raises his hand to bless the people, and then in like manner also *sends forth* the people. This conclusion at the end of Mass sends us forth with God’s blessing and the mission to carry on the Good News of Christ to all those we will be meeting in our daily lives. *“As the Father sent me, so also am I sending you”* (John 20:21).

The angel’s asks the Apostles, *“Why do you stand looking up toward heaven?”* This is the pivotal point and the activity of our Catholic Church. Meanwhile, let us not stand around idle, for we have a mission to accomplish by helping others to also cross the bridge from earth to heaven by teaching them about the Good News and being Jesus’ witnesses in the world.