

Solemnity of the Ascension Year “A”

May 23-24, 2020

Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23; Matthew 28:16-20

The Solemnity of the Ascension is observed with the highest degree of celebration from a liturgical perspective. For years, it was a holy day observed 40 days after Easter, thus always on a Thursday. This is exactly where it belongs technically. But for many reasons, it is transferred to the next Sunday in many parts of the world and in almost all dioceses in this country, save a few. We reserve the term *solemnity* for our highest feasts.

The observance of today’s feast is of great antiquity. Although no documentary evidence of the feast exists prior to the 400 A.D., Saint Augustine notes that it is of Apostolic origin. Yet if we are honest, I can see why the disciples may never have envisioned the Ascension as a day of joy and feast. It had to be bittersweet.

This event is hard to picture given our limited intellects. We come face to face with our own limitations, grasping to encapsulate this mystery. In Acts of the Apostles (1:11), after the Lord ascends out of their sight, the angels ask why the disciples just stand there, staring into space. As Jesus ascends, he tells the disciples to wait for the power of the Holy Spirit.

Can this feast be one of joy for us even when on the face of it we have lost our tangible link with Jesus in the Eucharist? It seems impossible to picture the apostles without some real sadness on this day, and yet his Ascension to his heavenly home is precisely the place to which we have been called. It is a temporary separation, and for God’s faithful people, so is death. It is not the end. In short, we should not feel abandoned:

Thus, reflecting upon this Feast, Saint Augustine could write:

“He did not leave heaven when he came down to us; nor did he withdraw from us when he went up again into heaven...”¹

¹ Augustine, *Sermo de Ascensione Domini*, 98, 1-2

The Solemnity of the Ascension reminds us not only that our true home is in heaven, but that we shall approach these gates in simplicity and humility. It is precisely humility that in the end, carries us upward.

Today's Gospel is also a challenge. In Matthew's account the final words of Jesus are ones of challenge. The Lord did not seem interested in lengthy farewells. There was much work to do. And we have much to do to prepare to return to Mass next weekend. So please allow me some extended time to explain the latest developments.

On Saturday afternoon, our Governor announced some revisions to his Executive Order and this was done in collaboration with religious leaders, chief among them Archbishop Hebda. Places of worship will be able to welcome up to 25% of seating capacity, with a cap at 250 persons. For us, that is significantly less than 25%, but we have a plan to make this work.

A new color-coded **seating map** is being prepared, indicating that larger households should sit in sections marked red, while smaller ones (esp. couples and singles) should be directed to narrower pews, marked in blue. **Prepare-** some doors entry only, others reserved for exits.

Communion in the hand is the preferred mode of receiving from the perspective of safety, though individual preferences will be respected **Plan-** the flow of the liturgy will be slightly different: no congregational singing, simple entrance, no congregating in Church after Mass, etc. This will require adjustment. Please check the parish website for updates.

Be a good Catholic by observing these protocols- you are encouraged to wear a mask during Mass, removing it for Holy Communion. The distribution takes place at the end of Mass, allowing for an orderly distribution beginning on the side sections and working back towards the center. Initially, only priests and deacons will distribute. Communion will take longer, though after a prayer of thanksgiving, you may exit.

Extra scrutiny on the Cathedral- long-time parishioners have used the phrase, “we know the drill,” to refer to situations in which either protesters or reporters or unusual circumstances ensue.

Free to express yourself, but if there are reporters, you ought not feel obliged to speak with them, but we are always kind and respectful as they are trying to do their jobs.

In all this, as troubling as it may be, or complicated, it will all in the end we will be gathering again very soon. It will be so good to see you again in person. we find the pathway to our true and eternal home. Let us go there rejoicing, grateful that He has shown us the way.