

Christ's Ascension to Heaven gives us something to celebrate after this tragic week, because it's empowering! It's not just a prequel to Pentecost. When we reflect on this event, it both grounds us in our mission as Christians, and it gives us so much hope for a glorious future.

On first impression, this marks the end of Jesus's earthly ministry. It's his goodbye to his disciples. There won't be any more post-Resurrection appearances, no more popping in and out of their lives, no more returns until the end of history.

Many Catholics are like these disciples gathered around Jesus. They want to keep Jesus to themselves. But Jesus knows better: it's time to grow up, time for the students to graduate, time for them and us to carry on his mission and spread his Good News.

Jesus orders this first generation of Christians to tell others about his resurrection from the dead, his power to forgive our sins and to give us eternal life. It's not a one-time order; it's given to every generation of Christians. Our mission is to market Christ, to promote Christ, to sell Christ, to make Christ the King recognized by more and more people so they can be saved. That won't happen if we keep him to ourselves.

Ordained ministers have to do the hard sell. But all of us have to do the soft sell: talking about Christ in our families, with classmates or coworkers, with the other people in our lives. More on that in a moment.

The Ascension is the finale to Christmas, when we celebrated that the Son of God put on human skin, was incarnated as a human being. With the Ascension, Jesus takes our flesh into Heaven, and our skin becomes part of God. A human body now sits next to God the Father. Our dignity is increased exponentially.

This is the fulfillment of God's plan for us, to reconcile us to him through Christ. Jesus didn't ascend just to be up there by himself. He ascended as a human, so that being like us, we might all be children of God and gain entry. Jesus prepared the way for us and now intercedes for us.

After Christ's Ascension, the only thing the apostles still needed was that kick in the butt from the Holy Spirit, to give them the strength and courage they needed to "get out there" with the Good News about Jesus Christ, that he is the way to eternal life –and to give them the inspiration they needed to be convincing.

Nine days later the Holy Spirit made a home in them, and the same Holy Spirit makes a home in us at Baptism. Just like with the apostles, he's present in us to give us the moxy, the courage to talk about Jesus, and to inspire us to say the right thing.

Forget yourself when you talk about Jesus – you don't have to be profound, you don't have to be prepared. Don't try to control it. Trust that the Holy Spirit in you works through you. Whenever someone share a problem or worry with you, that's a soft sell opportunity. Ask to pray with them about it; pray for their concern and pray for the person who's struggling. Display a crucifix and some statues or prints of Jesus or Mary or the saints in your home. Soft sell. In a restaurant, pray before you eat. Soft sell.

The irony of the Ascension is that by leaving earth, Jesus promises to be with us forever, through our paschal mysteries, our sufferings and death, into eternal life. Christ is with us in a new way: in his Spirit, so we can continue his ministry and proclaim his risen presence. We are Christ's arms and legs and voice now.

Jesus's final gesture on earth was to give his disciples his blessing – a sure sign that they, and us, will be successful – not 100% of the time; there will be rejections. But there will also be successes. Have confidence in his Holy Spirit within you!

Fr. John Ozella – May 29, 2022