

Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord - May the Faith (Force) be with You and Make your Prayer Life Grow.

May 16, 2021.

It's May. Remember "**May the Force be with You**"? It was first uttered by Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi to Luke Skywalker in the original trilogy Star Wars movies. The idea George Lucas had back then was that there would be three movies to tell a single story. So the second movie, "The Empire Strikes Back" would end on a low point: Han Solo is captured, the Empire is at the height of its power, Luke's training was incomplete and he found out that Darth Vader was his father, leaving the audience feeling rather anxious and unfulfilled. But all that anxiety is relieved in the spectacular closure that the "Return of the Jedi" gives. I believe that Lucas did this because of box offices — \$\$\$.

Our Holy Scripture can loosely be divided into trilogy too. It is definitely not because of dollars, but is to keep the believers in unity in the Kingdom of God. For example, the writings of Saint Luke are not altogether unlike the "Star Wars" saga. What we have is something of a trilogy in the writings of Luke along with his engagement with the Old Testament. Part One of the story of God is told in the life of Israel, especially the life of Moses and the Prophets. In the Gospel of Luke we get Part Two of the story of God, through the life and promises of Jesus Christ. And what we have in the Acts of the Apostles is Part Three of the story of God, this time through the Holy Spirit and the fulfillment of the promises of Jesus Christ, thus linking the story of Jesus to the story of Christianity. Instead of sadness and depression after Jesus' Ascension, the disciples are left with great promises and blessings, joyfully blessing God continually. What more could we believers ask for?

What more indeed! Luke leaves the ending of his gospel on a high note but an even higher note is hinted at when Jesus tells the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they have been clothed with power from on high. Jesus is, of course, alluding to the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples and grants them power and authority, thus establishing the means for God to continually form for Himself a people – namely, the church. Thus, the story of God is unlike any other story because it never ends.

It would have been enough if God had simply come as a person, incarnate, to stand with us in solidarity, to take our human nature and redeem it. This alone would have been sufficient. It would have been enough if God had raised Jesus from the dead, to destroy death for us. All these wondrous graces aside, it would have been enough if God had only given us his Holy Spirit, to provide a means of grace and hope for glory by the giving of His very self. What an ongoing ending to the wondrous saga of God! Every single act of God is sufficient for our salvation and sustenance. So what we find now, with the Ascension, is that we, the church, are enrolled in God's story, God's ongoing and enduring drama of love and adventure.

Jesus' Ascension closes a chapter in salvation history, marking the end of his earthly ministry but begins a new chapter in salvation history with the descent of the Holy Spirit. Even though there were just a few witnesses to this Ascension event, it had great implications for the future of the entire Church, both then and continuing to the present day. Up until that moment, Jesus was seen only where he was, in and around the towns surrounding Galilee. Now, with his Ascension to sit at the right hand of the Father, Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, present to all believers. This is the great paradox of the Ascension. **By removing himself from the world, he would no longer be confined to a single place or a single moment, but he would be alive in the Spirit to all people for all time.** While it seemed at first glance to be an isolated

heavenly event, in truth that moment opened the way for his message to spread throughout the world forever, wherever people live in his Spirit even as his Spirit abides in them. Today the Church is literally the Body of Christ, his presence in the world, and it is only as we live out that truth in our lives that the good news of the Gospel can continue to spread in our midst and throughout the world. We are his presence in the world, seen by all in our relations with one another, in our work and in our worship. This should bring to all of us, who call ourselves Christians, an awesome sense of responsibility.

The Ascension makes Jesus a universal figure, drawing all believers to him, and sending us to be witnesses of the Good News. As we prepare for the **feast of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church**, keep in mind that we all share the Good News. How we express it depends on the time and the place. Yes, there are some divisions in the Christian community that disempower us. Jesus' work is to redeem messes, personal and public. We have a large responsibility in that work. During these great 50 days between Easter and Pentecost, there is time to reflect on the universal ascended Lord and the gospel message. It will not be the same message in every place or every context, but it will be the Good News that ***Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.*** **God called us to our missions that he will provide the spiritual and material gifts that we need to fulfill our missions. God will not leave us orphans (cf. John 14:18)—he is our Father! He will give us every good thing we need along the way if we only pray and ask him (cf. Matthew 7:11)**

This is the reason we can trust the Church. Jesus is already enthroned in heaven, and that throne can never be usurped. As members of the Church through Baptism, we are members of his body. We continue in our own lives the work that Jesus did in his earthly life: spreading the Good News of God's mercy and salvation, healing those around us by loving our neighbours as ourselves, and offering our own sufferings to God in union with Christ's sufferings. In this way, the salvation that Jesus won for the world is gradually being spread throughout the world through us. This is why Jesus said, "**Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations... And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.**" He guides us through his Church. There we are sure to find grace in the sacraments and truth of Christ's teaching. And the guarantee of the trustworthiness of that grace and that truth is, precisely, Christ's Ascension - the fact that he is established firmly on an everlasting throne. And so, when we obey Church teaching in faith and morals, we obey Christ. If we want to be assured of the fruitfulness and victory of our own efforts in life, we have only to stay united to Christ by staying united to his Church.

May the sights and sounds of God's great story encourage us not only to have faith in the ascended Jesus but also to stay in step with the Holy Spirit, who lives within us to bring God's presence into our everyday lives and guides us to do the work to share the story. May the Force (Faith) be with Us and Make our Prayer Life Grow! Amen