

Homily for the Feast of the Ascension  
Saturday, May 12, 2018  
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All over the world, today, we celebrate the worldly tradition of honoring our mothers, mothers formed by the ultimate natural event; the birth of a child. This day is a big day in America. All the flowers, gifts, candy and cards will certainly help someone feel very special... and the church wants to join you in that special moment and wish all mothers here today a very happy mother's day! It is also important, today, to note that in its most basic form, the feelings and associations evoked by the word "mother" are not the same for everyone. We all don't have the same experiences with motherhood beyond that ultimate natural event of birth. Some of us never knew our earthly moms, some of us may have had great relationships with our moms, and others may have had painful ones. Some of us lost our mothers at an early age or may still be actively grieving a beloved mother's recent passing. Yet, whether we knew her or not, whether we had a great relationship with her or not, whether your mom is beside you today or not, the one thing we all can all celebrate together is that our mothers gave us the gift of life—that we are here is her gift to us.

Jesus understood the importance of motherhood to us. One of his last acts on earth was to leave all of us a heavenly mother, Mary. So

what we all have together on this earth, is the common gift of life from our earthly mothers and the common gift of Motherhood from our Heavenly mother. As we ascend from our birth through our earthly mother to adulthood under the care of our heavenly mother, the question that arises for all of us is what do we do with this life! It is as much of a collective question as it is an individual one. Jesus answers that question for us in our first reading today. The disciples ask him “Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” and He recognizes immediately that they still don’t understand his life’s mission... The disciples’ inheritance is not the physical land of Israel. Now the inheritance is heaven; the journey from slavery in Egypt is now a journey from sin and it crosses through the sea of baptism and finally into heaven. But these disciples did not yet understand this. Jesus responds to their question. He says, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons ... you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.” The magisterium tells us that this is a profound call to action... What Jesus is telling us here, the answer to the question the disciples posed to him, is “No, I’m not going to restore the kingdom to Israel – on this earth, you are going to restore my kingdom while I go make a place for you in heaven...” Jesus is very clear, what he is saying to them and to us today is that there is no time to waste. “As I leave you,” he says, “get busy, you have a lot of work to do.” “You will be my witnesses ....to the ends of the earth.”

How will the word get to the ends of the earth if not for us? Clearly, we are not to sit back and just let world and the culture around us rot. We are called to use this gift of our lives to make society and the culture holy and we can do so by witnessing that we follow Christ, by sharing our remarkable Catholic faith to a lost and weary culture. We must have the courage in this world to use this life to evangelize the good news of our faith. We, the Catholics, are the protectors of human life, from conception to natural death, and we must lead the fight against any planned termination of it. But we are also the liberators of those who are linked to that act, people who desperately need the mercy of this church for their salvation. We, the Catholics, are the champions of family life and we must lead the fight against redefining marriage, but we are also the liberators of those who choose to live outside that definition, who need the comfort of our faith for their salvation. We are the defenders of the poor and the marginalized, but we are also the liberators of people who would discriminate against them. The people who need the Church's theology of social justice to melt their hearts of stone. How will they change their hearts without our witness? This is the kind of courage we need in our culture today, Catholic Courage! And it is manifested through the common gift of life that we each share. Catholic courage is to use this life to speak the truth, to resist its temptations, to forgive and to love another unconditionally.

More heroic than any achievements of physical valor today, Catholic moral courage is a voice the world desperately needs us to speak with our lives and it is what Jesus called the disciples to do as he ascended into heaven some 2018 years ago today. In our gospel today, Jesus fulfills his promise of passing on the power of the Holy Spirit. He reminds the disciples that the Christ would suffer and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations. And then, as if they weren't going to figure it out for themselves, Jesus tells the disciples, "You are witnesses of these things. And behold I am sending the promise, the power, of my Father upon you." Use your life to renew the earth with my word. And so, today, on Ascension Sunday, we want to recognize the call our founder left us with in this life. As we ascend from our birth, through this valley of sin, knowing our destiny is heaven, let us be ever mindful that we are the people he has chosen. Let us embrace the power and the courage that has been handed down to us through time and evangelize the world with the good news of this amazing Catholic faith – In times like ours, Christ is relying on you and I to use our gift of life to witness to him where no one else will.