

THE SOLEMNITY OF THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD - MAY 29, 2025

If you've ever been on a cruise ship - especially one of those large ones that carry thousands of passengers - you'll notice that you rarely if ever see the captain. You might see many other crew members running around, but the captain is usually out of sight. That is because he spends most of his time in the ship's control room overseeing the steering of the ship to make sure that it gets safely to its destination. Even though he is the ultimate authority while we are on the sea, we don't really think too much about him. When we're on board, we usually are out on the deck relaxing or walking around enjoying all the entertainment the ship has to offer. However, the reason we can relax and enjoy ourselves is because he has everything under control and is making sure that we have a safe and enjoyable ride.

Today, we are celebrating the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven. In many people's minds, this is simply the day that Jesus went up to Heaven and left the apostles behind. He had taught them all that He knew, and now it was time for Him to leave the scene and let them try to manage without Him. But that is not at all what this day is about. What is really happening is that Jesus ascends into Heaven to take His rightful place as Lord of Heaven and Earth. He now is in charge. Like the captain of a vessel, He is out of sight, but He is running everything. He is the one who now has control over the universe. He is the one who is now steering all of human history according to His plan of salvation.

This is how Saint Paul describes it in today's second reading: "God...seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion.... And he has put all things under his feet...." (Eph 1:20-21 NRSV).

That is the bold claim we make every time we confess that Jesus is Lord. We are proclaiming that, though we cannot see Him, Jesus is the ultimate authority. He is the one who is guiding all of human history. There is nothing that happens without His permission. He is in Heaven because He is overseeing everything that takes place all over the universe. Those who have any power and authority on Earth have it because He has given it to them. They are accountable to Jesus for the way they exercise their power. He can take it away from them just as quickly as He gave it to them.

It was because of this belief in the Lordship of Jesus Christ who ascended to the right hand of God that the apostles and first Christians could be so bold in spreading the gospel. That is why they could stand up to the Roman authorities and the Jewish leaders. They believed that there was an authority greater than those who threatened to put them in jail and put them to death. They were convinced that the strength of earthly kings and princes was just an illusion. Certainly they could cause them physical harm, but they couldn't take away their freedom as followers of Jesus Christ. They could destroy their bodies, but they could not touch their souls.

This feast day is a reminder to us that we are also called to be bold in the way we live out our faith. Like those first Christians, we must live our faith with conviction. It begins by putting our whole self and everything we have under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It means that He is not

just a part of my life, but the center of it. If He is Lord of my life, then in whatever I say or do, I will seek to please only Him. He cannot only be the Lord of some parts of my life, but all of it. He must be Lord over my check book, my sexuality, and my leisure time. Because He died, rose again, and ascended to Heaven, He has won the right to be Lord of us all.

That does not mean that Jesus is a tyrant. Not at all. The one who is Lord of all is also the one who was willing to die for us. We have a Lord who loved us and made the ultimate sacrifice for us. When we make Him the Lord of our lives, then we find true freedom. The fact is, if Jesus is not our Lord, then we have put someone or something else in His place. Whether it is pleasure, or possessions, those masters take more from us than they give. In the end, they enslave us. But Jesus came so that we could be free. When we give our whole selves over to Him and live according to His word, we discover a joy and peace that nothing in this world can give us.

Jesus has gone before us into Heaven to rule over this world. But He doesn't want us to just sit back and enjoy the ride. Rather, He wants us to join Him in bringing this good news to others. That is what it means for us to be the Church. As Saint Paul goes on to tell us in today's second reading, Jesus Christ is the head and we are the body. Just as our head directs all the members of our body, so Jesus is directing us. When we make Him the Lord of our lives, He will use us to touch the hearts of others. We will be His hands bringing food to the poor. We will be His voice bringing comfort to those who are suffering. We will be His feet leading others on the way that leads to holiness and freedom. The more we give ourselves to Jesus, the freer we will be to serve others.

Jesus Christ who conquered sin and death has now ascended into Heaven to take His rightful place on His throne. He is directly all of human history. And He is inviting us to make Him the Lord of our lives and to join Him in spreading His kingdom of love and mercy throughout this troubled world. We can do that boldly because we know He has already won the victory and that one day He will come again so that everyone will know that Jesus Christ is Lord.