

May 17, 2026—Solemnity of the Ascension

The first apparition of the risen Jesus recorded in Scripture was to Mary Magdalene. Even though the other Gospels mention additional women at the tomb with her, St. John focuses this Gospel account totally upon Mary Magdalene. Weeping before the empty tomb, she encountered the risen Jesus and thought He was a gardener. She only recognized Jesus when He spoke her name: “**Mary**”. Jesus knows your name, too, which means that He knows you and loves you personally. She fell down at His feet, this time weeping with joy, and Jesus said a very strange thing: “**Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God**” (20:17).

What is the meaning of those words, do not cling to me? It would be very natural for Mary to hold on to the Jesus she loved so much; she thought He was lost to her forever, yet there He was. However, the death and resurrection had changed the relationship Jesus had with those who knew Him before those events. They had to relate to Him in a new way. His body had been glorified; His mission in this world was complete. Jesus meant, do not cling to the old way of knowing Him, there was a new and deeper relationship that was established with the Paschal events. This new relationship had a couple more steps—“**I have not yet ascended to my Father**”, He said; the Ascension would come 40 days later and the descent of the Holy Spirit 10 days after that. Most of the world has not been thinking about Easter for many weeks. We are in, what we call, the Easter Season because the Ascension and Pentecost are intrinsically connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Today, we are celebrating the Asension of our Lord into heaven (moved to Sunday from Thursday). We rejoice in seeing Jesus in His place seated at the right hand of His Father in glory. The Gospel is from Matthew’s account. Jesus called the apostles together on the holy mountain and gave them His final instructions. He told them, “**All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.**” With these words, Jesus established the Sacrament of Baptism, which is Trinitarian, in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

This scene is called The Great Commission. The apostles and the whole Church were given the task of going out to the entire world and proclaiming the faith. All through the ages, it is the duty of the Church to teach the Catholic faith and baptize. Baptism makes you a member of the Church and the Kingdom of God.

Jesus also made this promise: “**And behold, I am with you always until the end of the age.**” The end of the age is another way of saying the end of the world when He will return in glory, to judge the living and the dead and bring the final triumph of God to the world. This is also a promise to protect His Holy Catholic Church throughout the trials of history and the corrupting work of the devil. The Catholic Church has remained intact for 2000 years; it is the only institution that has lasted from ancient times. The Church is not a dead institution, but is still alive, spreading the faith and baptizing new members. Jesus’ promise is that Holy Mother Church will remain until the end of time. Half joking, it has been said, just the fact that the devil and we priests haven’t destroyed it, in 2000 years is a sure sign of the supernatural character of the Catholic Church.

The resurrection began a new kind of relationship with Jesus. Before, in His human Body, He could relate to people one at a time or in limited groups through His teaching and miracles. After He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, Jesus can relate to each individual person in the world, no matter how many there are until the end of time. He speaks to us in the Holy Bible; He is with us personally in the Holy Eucharist; He touches our lives through each sacrament and in the support and prayers of our fellow Catholics and the saints in heaven.

At the beginning of the homily, I mentioned that St. Mary Magdelene was the first to see the risen Jesus according to the Bible, but there is a pious custom, not a doctrine, that says the Blessed Mother was the first to receive a visit from her risen Son. It would be fitting, since Holy Mary was most closely united to her Son throughout His life and at His passion and death on the Cross. Through her Immaculate Heart, free from the barrier that sin puts in the way of our love of Jesus, she understood the meaning of what was happening before her eyes.

Due to her freedom from Original Sin and all its effects, her mind was not dimmed to spiritual realities. Even though her mother’s heart was afflicted with sorrow, she knew that it was the will of God that the Crucifixion should happen. She could grasp God’s plan for the redemption of the world through the blood and pain of His most sorrowful passion. When she saw the risen Jesus, Mary had a love and joy

beyond all telling that filled her Motherly Heart. Mary, our Mother, help us rejoice in Jesus our Savior and follow Him without hesitation or reservation.