

Ascension (B)

- One of the most moving things that I have to do is prepare funerals with family members.
- It's a really painful time for them – an in-between time as they know they have to let go of the person they have loved so much & trust that we have a loving God who raises this person to a new life.
- They also are able to speak lovingly & with gratitude about the qualities & characteristics of this person.
- Often, not always, the person about whom they speak so lovingly is clearly reflected in the qualities they have themselves – they have sometimes unconsciously taken on those wonderful characteristics themselves such that they in some ways are reflections of their spouse, father, or mother.
- What they have loved in them remain as characteristics in their own lives.
- The Feast of the Ascension is really a kind of liminal moment in the Easter season - it is a time between times; a moment when we have left one place in our journey, but have not yet arrived at a second.
- Sometimes we have to let go of friends when they move away & sometimes there is the extremely painful letting go when someone dear to us dies.
- But through all those times of "letting go" we grow & develop, not the way we would have planned, but we do, unless we aren't prepared to let go.
- The feast of the Ascension is the feast of 'letting go' & of growing.
- Jesus has finished his work especially of forming the community of disciples & it would have been hard for him to let go of them, to have them continue his work of bringing God's love alive in the world.
- For the disciples it would have been extremely heartbreaking to let go of their teacher, friend & the one who opened their lives to so much more than what they had before.
- But they did grow & after Pentecost when the Spirit of Jesus fired up their hearts & minds, they were able to do the very things that Jesus did.
- Never in their wildest dreams would they have thought that they could.
- But apart from the letting go, there's another aspect to this feast – the work of Jesus in forming the disciples, & of their taking on the characteristics they have loved in him.
- What Jesus leaves for us is the task of continuing to form people in faith, to develop people's, & especially our children's, relationship with God.
- That is why our Catholic schools are an important aspect of our ministry as church – to form & holistically develop young people for life that includes a receptiveness & responsiveness to God by being in relationship with him, to know his love for them.

- The challenge for us, as it was for Jesus with his disciples, is to do that well, knowing that the Spirit assists us - & then letting go so that they put into practice what they have learnt from our witness to our faith.
- The simple words of today's Gospel are the very last, most important, words that Jesus spoke to his apostles when he left them at his Ascension.
- These are the words that lay out the work that Jesus most wanted the apostles to do after he had gone – to love as they experienced his love for them.
- These are the words that tell us, most simply & clearly, the full, final intention that Jesus had for us.
- These are the words that express the deepest reason for why there is a church & why we are Christians – That is, the church, you & I exist, as Christians, for the sole purpose of being the visible, physical, concrete presence of Jesus here & now in the world, by witnessing to his love.
- By our whole lives, by everything we say & do, we are witnesses of the immense meaning of the fact that a loving God has given all people the fullness of life, even unto eternity, through Jesus Christ.
- We are witnesses of this because we know that this is the good news that gives complete meaning to the whole of human life.
- We are witnesses of this because we know that throughout the rest of history even to the end of time it is through us that the world can know & enjoy this same astounding truth.
- This is the one work of the church; this is the one reason why we are Christians; this is the one message & mandate of the feast of the Ascension in all its compelling directness: "You are to be my witnesses."
- It is as simple, clear & concise as that.
- Jesus sends his followers out 'to the whole world' to continue his ministry, but we can only really do this if we know & love Jesus, & are then able to manifest the qualities & characteristics we have come to love about him.
- It is the 'whole world' to which they are sent; not just their cosy little corner of the world but the whole world; it's what Christians for the last 2,000 years have been called to do: continue Jesus' ministry to the whole world; it's what each & every one of us is called to do today: 'proclaim the Good News to all creation'.
- That doesn't mean standing on street corners with a Bible in our hands but it means proclaiming the Good News through our everyday actions & by being open & honest about our faith; it means treating all people as Jesus would - it is about letting others see in us today the love Jesus expressed for people in his own time.
- You who receive the Eucharist for the first time today are invited to a deeper relationship with Jesus who loves you so that you may witness to that love by the way Jesus can love others through you.