

## **Ascension (A)**

- I find that one of the hardest things to do in life is to “let go”, especially when I’ve invested so much of my time, work & my very self into something that I have to let go of.
- As a priest it happens as you move from one parish or community to another, because it’s not just about leaving the work you’ve done for someone else to continue, it’s about letting go of people who have become very dear to you.
- But come up to times in our lives when we have to let go; from the moment of what must be the excruciating departure from the womb: you let go of your child each time & increasingly as they start kindergarten & then school, then their buying their first car & then their moving away from home & a little of you dies each time.
- And even for you as children, you have to let go in trust as you start going to kinder & then school, then leaving home, etc. (incidentally, my brother only went to kinder one day – he couldn’t let go of my mum & when she said we all have to do things that separate us from one another for a while – dad goes to work, mum goes to work & does the shopping, Steven goes to school, now it’s your turn to go to kinder to learn new things & make new friends. He said – I’ll do the shopping, you go & learn new things).
- 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 “letting goes” we grow & develop, not the way we would have planned, but we do.
- And resistance to letting go slowly makes us die, because we’re not prepared to work with change that brings life.
- Letting go demands of us change – change of my status quo in attitudes, positions I’ve held, behaviour, even the very understanding of myself & my identity – what makes me who I am. This letting go is also the challenge for our society & global community as we approach a post-pandemic world.
- Serious questions need to be addressed in economics, politics, work structures, relationships between nations & people that call for a new order, new ways of living & working, because if we resist change & only want to go back to where we were, we will die.
- Life demands change, & for change to be life-giving, it needs to engage creative imagination that not only focusses on good outcomes, but ethical, moral & compassionate means of getting there that engenders growth.
- 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 grew & 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.
- What Jesus leaves for us is the task of continuing to form people in faith, to develop people's, relationship with God.
- That is why our Catholic schools are an important aspect of our ministry as church – to form & develop holistically young people for life that includes a receptiveness & responsiveness to God by being in relationship with him.
- 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; 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 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 only 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.
- In the meantime he was relying on them (& now on us) to make sure that the Gospel was preached & lived.
- And in this time, it is beholden upon us to be open to the Spirit who can guide us to consider what are the things we have to let go of, & let

ourselves be enlightened by that Spirit who can engage our creative imagination to be authentic bearers of the Gospel in these times.

- The mission is to bear witness to the Good News of Jesus to the ends of the earth, to go into all nations of the world & proclaim the good news to the whole creation - The universal reach of this mission is clear.
- The message of Jesus is meant to be good news in the ears of all people irrespective of nationality or culture.
- Given the fact that till date many nations have embraced other religions in preference to the gospel & still others reject Christianity, maybe it is time to ask: Are these people rejecting the message of Jesus, or are they rejecting the messengers & the way in which they have presented it?
- Maybe we've spoilt the Good Story in the telling & the living?
- How can we tell the Good News anew, & how can we live the Gospel authentically as we embark on a new era in history?