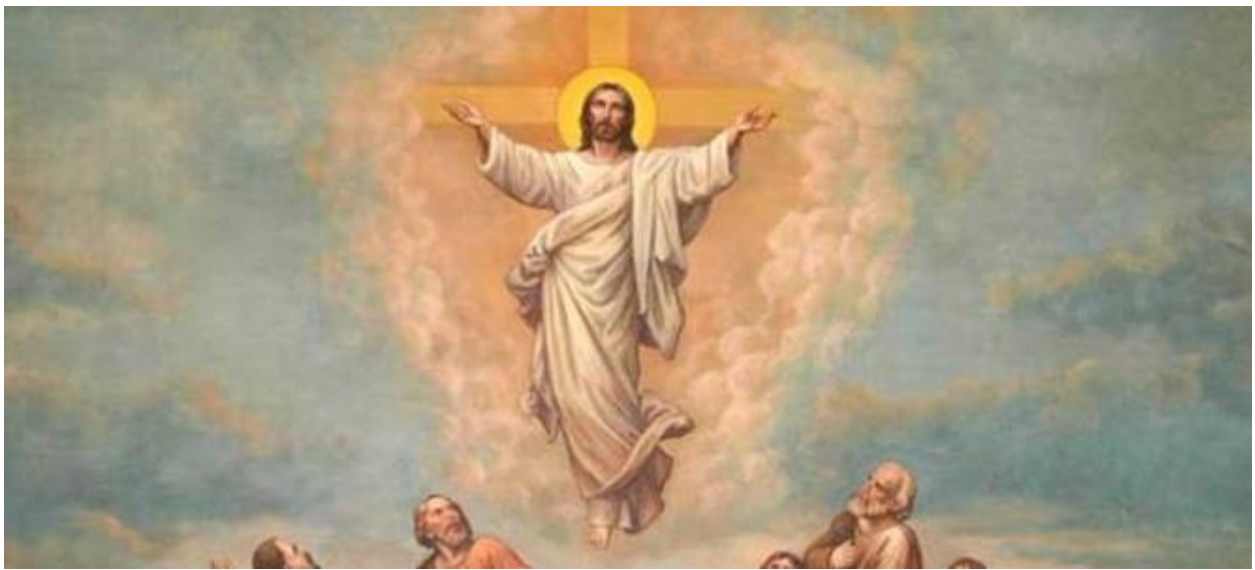


FROM FATHER JOHN – *“All you peoples, clap your hands, shout to God with cries of gladness, For the LORD, the Most High, the awesome, is the great king over all the earth. God mounts his throne amid shouts of joy; the LORD, amid trumpet blasts. Sing praise to God, sing praise; sing praise to our king, sing praise. For king of all the earth is God; sing hymns of praise. God reigns over the nations, God sits upon his holy throne.” ~ Psalm 47*

God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord, Alleluia!!!



Today is the celebration of the Solemnity of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. This feast is an ancient feast, one of the oldest in the Church, and celebrates our Christian belief in the bodily Ascension of our Lord Jesus into the heavenly kingdom on the 40th day after His resurrection. For many years, this feast day was actually celebrated on the 40th day after Easter which falls on the Thursday of the Sixth week of Easter. Which would have been this past Thursday. Thus, the name Ascension Thursday.


In 1999, the Vatican gave the United States permission to move the celebration from Ascension Thursday to the following Sunday. The reason for this is that Sunday is “the foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church” (Canon 1246) and most of the bishops in the United States thought it was important to celebrate this feast on a Sunday when the most number of Catholics would be

able to attend mass and celebrate the feast. By decree of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, authority to implement the change was granted to the ecclesiastical provinces. The Diocese of Joliet is in the ecclesiastical province of Chicago.

The ecclesiastical provinces of Boston, Hartford, New York, Newark, Omaha, and Philadelphia continue to observe Ascension Thursday as a holy day of obligation. This is the practice in the states of Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Nebraska, and Pennsylvania.

But, in the Diocese of Joliet, and throughout all the dioceses in Illinois, The Feast of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ is celebrated on the Sunday after the 40th Day after Easter. Ascension Thursday is no longer a Holy Day of Obligation in our diocese.

Saint Augustine



O Holy Spirit, descend
plentifully into my heart.
Enlighten the dark corners of
this neglected dwelling and
scatter there Thy cheerful
beams.

AZ QUOTES

St. Peter wrote in his first letter that we should *“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.”* (1 Peter 3:15) As Catholics, we’re not very good at this. We don’t wear our faith on our sleeve. We don’t like to tell people about our faith, we don’t talk about it much and, sometimes, when we encounter someone who’s an evangelical talk about their faith or preach to us about their faith, we get angry. Why is that? I mean, all they’re doing is what St. Peter is telling us to do.

Have you ever wondered why Catholics don't feel comfortable telling other people about our faith?

Our Lord Jesus said to his disciples: *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows him. But you know him, because he remains with you, and will be in you."* (John 14:15 – 17)

I was in a fender bender about six months after I was ordained. I was on the way to Fr. Frank Vitas' mother's funeral so I was dressed in my clerics and I had my Alb and stole to concelebrate the funeral mass. The police officer who came to the accident ended up giving me a ticket but he felt really bad about it. He said to me, "Father, I have to give you this ticket. I really don't want to but I have to give you a ticket. I can't give you any advice but if it was me, I'd plead non-guilty. I'm not allowed to tell you what you should do but I'd plead not guilty."

I wasn't sure what he meant by all that. One of my best friends is a personal injury attorney who does a lot of traffic cases. He was also a member of the parish I was assigned to at the time so I called him and asked him what the officer meant and what I should do.

He said to me, "Don't worry about. I'll go to court with you." I said to him, "I can't let you do that. Just tell me what to do." He said, "No, I'm going with you. Look Father, this is the one thing in life that I am really, really good at. I'll go with you and I'll take care of it. Just make sure you wear your best black suit and your Roman collar."

There were four police officers sitting at the prosecutors table on the day we went to court. One of them was the officer who gave me the ticket. As we approached them my buddy said to me, "Don't say a word, keep your mouth shut and let me do the talking."

My buddy, the lawyer, walks up to them and says, "Okay, which one of you guys gave my parish priest a ticket?" They all started to chuckle. The one officer

sheepishly raised his hand. And then my buddy says to him, "You know what this means, don't you?" and the officer says, "No, what does it mean?"

My friend looked at him for a moment and then said, "That you're going to rot in hell." They all died laughing. In about five minutes my friend, the lawyer, took care of everything and the case was dismissed.

My friend, a lawyer, defended me, gave me good counsel, interceded on my behalf, spoke for me and mediated a problem I had in such a way that the problem went away. The whole process, the fact that I had a Counselor, a lawyer, defending me, gave me great comfort and consolation in the face of tribulation.

Our Lord Jesus promises to give us an Advocate, the Paraclete, The Holy Spirit. "*The Lord is my shepherd*," sounds familiar, but how about, "*The Lord is my defense lawyer*?" Yet that is the basic meaning of the word '*Paraclete*'. It has many different connotations: spokesperson, mediator, intercessor, teacher, comforter, consoler.

But the one connotation that it doesn't have is accuser. It means defender, protector. It never, ever means accuser. Take my lawyer friend. He defended me, he never accused me. He never even asked me if I was at fault in the fender bender. He just took my side, defended me and gave me good counsel.

Our Lord Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit to remain with us always; to defend us, to protect us, to comfort us, to teach us, to intercede on our behalf, to console us. Never, ever to accuse us.

St. Peter told us to "*Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.*"

Why aren't we very good at giving people a reason for our hope? I think it may have to do with the fact that we spend too much time thinking of God as an angry judge, as an accuser, as a God who delights in punishment. This is a trap, a very dangerous trap, that most of us fall into at one time or another. But, nothing could be further from the Truth.

This trap is set for us by our true enemy, the devil, the one who wants us to believe that our God is one who delights in punishment. But it is a lie, a lie that comes from the Father of all Lies.

The Truth is that our God delights in loving us, defending us, protecting us, consoling us. That is why He has sent us His Holy Spirit, that is why he gave us an, *“Advocate to be with us always, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows him. But we know him, because he remains with us, and will be in us.”*

May God Bless you and all those who love the Lord.

