

The disciples who completed Puccini's opera *Turandot*.

The Italian composer Giacomo Puccini wrote *La Boheme*, *Madama Butterfly*, and *Tosca*. It was during his battle with terminal cancer in 1922 that he began to write *Turandot*, which many now consider his best work. He worked on the score day and night, despite his friends' advice to rest, and to save his energy. When his sickness worsened, Puccini said to his disciples, "If I don't finish *Turandot*, I want you to finish it." He died in 1924, leaving the work unfinished.

His disciples gathered all that was written of *Turandot*, studied it in great detail, and then proceeded to write the remainder of the opera. It was completed by Franco Alfano. The world premier was performed in La Scala Opera House in Milan in 1926, and Arturo Toscanini, Puccini's favorite student, conducted it. The opera went beautifully.

When Toscanini came to the end of the part written by Puccini, he stopped the music, put down the baton, turned to the audience, and announced, "Thus far the master wrote, but then he died." There was a long pause; no one moved.

Then Toscanini picked up the baton, turned to the audience and, with tears in his eyes, announced, "But his disciples finished his work." The opera closed to thunderous applause, and to a permanent place in the annals of great works.

The Ascension account and its significance:

The Biblical accounts of the Ascension focus not so much on the details of the event as on the mission Jesus gave to his disciples.

For example, in the accounts narrated in Luke and Acts, the Ascension took place in Jerusalem.

In Matthew and Mark, on the other hand, the event occurred in Galilee. All accounts, however, agree that the Ascension took place on a mountain.

The Gospel writers apparently were not aiming at accuracy of historical detail but were more concerned with transmitting Our Lord's message. Christ's Ascension or *going up to heaven* completes his Incarnation or *coming down to earth*. Christ has opened the way to heaven for us. (CCC #661).

"Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, precedes us into the Father's glorious kingdom so that we, the members of his Body, may live in the hope of one day being with him forever" (CCC #666).

"Jesus Christ, having entered the sanctuary of heaven once and for all, intercedes constantly for us as the mediator who assures us of the permanent outpouring of the Holy Spirit" (CCC #667).

Reaching Peak Performance:

One of the superstars on the professional speakers' circuit is a man named **Charles Garfield**. He is a **psychologist from San Francisco**. He makes up to 150 speeches a year, he says. Actually, if the truth were known, he makes one speech 150 times. He began his career as a **mathematician for NASA**. He was part of the **Apollo Project** that put a man on the moon. He left NASA to study psychology. He became interested in what motivates people to reach their highest possible achievement in this life. He went to Berkeley and got a **PhD in psychology**. Then he interviewed 1,500 people on how they achieved what he called "peak performance." He published that result in a book, and then he started on the lecture circuit.

He said the one thing that all peak performers have in common is a sense of mission. "What you need in this life if you want to have fulfillment is a sense of mission." — **It is giving yourself to something that is greater than yourself**. That is what a mission is. That mission is found at the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel: "*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. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age*"(Mt 28:18-20). Not only does the Church have a mission to perform in this world, but **everybody in the Church is supposed to have a part in performing that mission**.