

Ascension Day, 2018
St. Mary Catholic Church, Richmond VA
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Karl was in charge of the orange juice. I was in charge of the pancakes.

It was mother's day, many years ago. My brother and I were just at that age where we thought we knew enough in order to make breakfast for mother's day.

My brother decided that he was going to make fresh squeezed orange juice. Because that was *fancy*.

I think he used a pair of scissors to stab a hole in the bottom of an orange. He squeezed with all his might. *Some* juice dripped down into mom's glass. Most of the juice sprayed all over the sink, floor and Karl's shirt.

By the end of his hard work, he had stabbed 16 oranges. Mom's glass was half full.

Meanwhile, I had the Bisquick. I was old enough to read a recipe on the box. But I learned a few things that day. For instance, I discovered that:

- + if you're not careful, Bisquick can quickly become like Virginia pollen, covering most of the kitchen. And...
- + it really *does* matter if you leave egg shells in the pancake batter.

I tried my best to cook my lumpy pancake batter on the griddle, but ended up with soup.

Then I had a brilliant idea. "If there are lumps in the batter, then I should make waffles! Because the waffle iron will squash the lumps and make everything right!"

Image what that kitchen looked like when mom and dad finally came in. It took all four of us a long time to clean it up!

But whenever we recalled that morning, we agreed that it was the *best* mother's day ever.

Similar adventures may be happening all around the country today. Some families are gathering at home, squishing lumps out of batter, removing eggshells from pancakes.

Some families will take mom out to brunch or dinner. Children will make homemade cards.

Adult children may give mom more expensive gifts. Phone calls will be made. Some moms will be surprised when a son or daughter arrives home from active duty today.

In other homes, mother's day is a day of remembering. Many moms have gone home to God. So, for many of us, Mother's Day is a day of remembering, and missing. Perhaps some tears.

In some homes, mother's day is a very hard day. I think of little Brody, who is 2, and his sister Mackenzie, who is 5. Their mother died this week at the age of 38. We celebrated her funeral here on Friday. What is mother's day like for them?

What is mother's day like for the couple who always wanted to have children, but couldn't? What is mother's day like for the woman who never married, and isn't quite sure what to do on a holiday focused on something she will never be? What is mother's day like for you if your mother abused you, abandoned you, seemed to love alcohol more than you?

What is mother's day like for the mom who is not sure how she's going to feed her children this week? For the mom who is raising her kids in war-torn Syria, for the mom in Africa afraid that terrorist may come and kidnap her daughter?

I'm not trying to ruin anyone's holiday. But the truth is - today can be a day of great joy, hearty laughter, sprayed orange juice. It can be a day of grateful memories, and tearful reminiscence. It can be a day of pain, loss, fear. All at once. All on the same day.

For the disciples of Jesus, I wonder if Ascension Day brought a confusing mix of emotions?

On one hand, the Ascension is a day of triumph and joyful fulfilment. The Risen Jesus promises that his friends will receive the gift of his life and spirit. They are now empowered to do his work. In word and deed, they will proclaim his Gospel to the ends of the earth.

They watch, as Jesus ascends into glory. For early Christians, this Ascension imagery is a promise that Jesus is now sharing the glory of heaven. A human being, real to the core, is now enfolded into the joy of eternity.

And here is the best part – Jesus promises to return to bring all of us, all of creation, home. It is the fulfilment of *his* mission, the beginning of *our* mission. That's worth celebrating!

But, think of how *hard* this day might be for the followers of Jesus. They had fallen in love with him as he led them through Galilee. They were thrilled by his message. He taught them a new way to think and love and dream.

And then, they lost him. They put him in the tomb. No matter how much faith you have, death hurts.

Then, on Easter, they *find* him again. An empty tomb. Angelic messengers. “He is not here. He is risen!”

They *saw* him. He spoke of forgiveness and peace. He ate with them. They had *lost* him. Then they had him *back*.

And now, on Ascension Day... they *lose* him again. They have to let him go, again.

He is taken from them, again. Perhaps Ascension Day was a confusing day of both joy and loss. Happy for him. Heartbroken as they let him go, *again*.

Yet even if those disciples were confused, they were filled with conviction. In both the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospel of Mark, we discover that the disciples of Jesus were certain of one thing after the Ascension. They were certain that it was *their turn to get to work*. Doing what Jesus did, *as* he did it, following his lead.

In Acts, Jesus says to his disciples, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth.”

In Mark’s Gospel, we are told that the disciples went forth, teaching everywhere. And the Lord confirmed the word *through accompanying signs*.”

Don’t miss that part. Whenever Jesus preached, he put his words into action. He proclaimed the love of God, and then he demonstrated the love of God through his actions. He spoke, then he fed the hungry, healed the sick, washed their feet, dried their tears, embraced the children.

He spoke about faith... he put his faith in action. Or as Mark puts it, Jesus spoke the word, and “confirmed it in signs.”

We all know how betrayed we feel when someone *says* to us, “I love you,” but then their actions don’t match their words. Hearts break that way.

One of the greatest challenges to faith in our modern world comes from the fact that so many Christians are good at speaking words of faith, but our actions don’t match our words.

Many Catholics know all the right words to say. And we’re good at telling other people how to live their lives.

But as Pope Paul VI said, what the world needs most these days is not more teachers or lecturers... what the world needs today is *witnesses*. People who will *say* what's true, and then *live* the truth in our daily actions.

The world has heard that "God is love" ... but that word must be "confirmed by signs" ... by our actions which put flesh on the life-changing Gospel of Jesus here and now.

If today is confusing for you, if this time of your life is a confusing mix of joy, memory, hope, heartbreak and worry... to you I say, "fear not. The Lord is risen! He is with you. You are his. And he has great plans for you."

For many of our brothers and sisters, *every* day is a confusing challenge. To them, the good news must be carried, in word and deed, by those of us who are fortunate enough to gather around this table, for a meal prepared by the Son of Mary, the Son of God.

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