

**Homily – Mark 16: 15-20**  
**Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord**  
**15 / 16 May 2021 – Sooeey / Riverstown**

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Many years ago there lived a very poor family in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina by the name of Carpenter. The oldest boy loved the outdoors and knew them well, but he didn't know much else. He was a teenager when his father took him on his first trip to the city, where he saw paved streets, skyscrapers, and electricity for the first time. The boy wanted to stay there and get an education. His father arranged for him to board with some family friends, who generously financed his studies when he decided to become a doctor. He graduated with honors, but declined all job offers to practice medicine in the city. He said he was going back to the mountains, where there were many sick people and few doctors.

For many years he ministered to the sick. Some paid; most couldn't. He gave his very best and helped everyone he could. In his old age he was in broken health himself and almost penniless. Two small rooms above the town grocery store were his home and office. At the foot of the creaky stairs leading up to his office was a sign with these words: "Dr. Carpenter is upstairs."

One morning someone climbed those stairs to find the devoted doctor dead. The entire community was plunged in grief. They wanted to erect some kind of monument to him. And they decided to simply write these words on a large tombstone: “Dr. Carpenter is upstairs.”

Well, Jesus is the Divine Doctor of our souls. He is “upstairs” in Heaven, where He ascended after His Resurrection. But He is still alive and is eager to help us through the Sacraments, the Word of God, and the Church. And every time we turn to Him in prayer, we climb the stairs to His office; because He is upstairs, Dr. Jesus is always in.

Today we celebrate the feast of the Ascension of our Lord. Well! The Ascension is an important dimension of the Easter season. And we know, the Resurrection of Jesus completes itself through the feast of the ascension.

The Ascension as described in the Gospel of Mark today is ‘Jesus being taken up’ while the apostles looked on. What it really means is the translation of this earthly reality into the heavenly dimension. St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians chapter 4, verse 10 probably gives us the best description of the Ascension. St. Paul

would say: “He has ascended beyond the heavens to fill the whole universe with His presence”.

Jesus is God, He is eternal, He is everywhere and He is never constrained by time and space. And the truth in the Ascension will be complete on the feast of Pentecost when Jesus sends His spirit assuring us that He is with us always to the end of time.

Now, what is the significance of this feast for you and for me? What has this feast got to tell us?

A few years ago I came across a touching incident shared by Fr. Michael Renninger, from Richmond, Virginia. He was speaking about a stroke that had happened to his grandmother several years ago which left her unable to walk properly, talk clearly and move her hands with confidence. The day the stroke occurred, Fr. Michael’s family called him and he rushed to meet his grandma in the hospital. On his arrival, his mother and his siblings who had been there all night long, asked him to remain at the hospital with his grandmother, so that they could go home and get some rest.

Now, he found his grandmother sleeping for most of the morning. But when someone brought in, her lunch tray, she woke up and told Fr. Michael with a slightly slurred

speech that she was hungry. She announced that she would start with the pudding that was on her tray. With a lump in his throat he watched as his grandmother tried to eat the pudding with a plastic spoon. But her hands were too unsteady. The stroke had caused damage to her muscle control and she simply could not get the pudding from the bowl into the mouth. And finally with tears in her eyes, she looked at Fr. Michael and said: “Michie, you are going to have to feed me now”.

A person who has spoon-fed her children and her grandchildren is now waiting to be spoon-fed. Well! “This is how life works. At one point in our life, someone feeds us, someone takes care of us, someone watches over us, and makes sure that we have what we need. And then there comes a point when they turn to us from a hospital bed and they say: ‘Michie, you are going to have to feed me now’. Eventually we have to pick up the spoon and we may have to feed the very one who spoon-fed us.

Jesus our Risen Lord, just before His Ascension tells His disciples: “repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to all nations and you are witnesses of these things”. If we prayerfully listen to these words, it might sound like Jesus is saying to them and to us that at one point He was the one who took care of us.

It sounds like Jesus is saying: ‘there was a time when I watched out for your needs, there was a time when I healed the sick here on earth, I fed the hungry, I preached the truth, I cast out evil, I challenged the hypocrites, I demanded justice, I called people to live Godly lives, I forgave sinners, I reached out to everyone, I embraced the outcaste, I worked tirelessly to convince people that God loves them passionately’. And just before His ascension it sounds like Jesus is saying: ‘Now, it is your turn’. Yes! Just as the father’s love enabled Christ to proclaim the Good News, now we are called to go forth in the power of the Spirit, and love the people that God puts in our path.

We have been given so much; and the time has come now that the Risen Lord tells His disciples and tells each of us: ‘now pick up the spoon and you do it’.

Luke comes out so powerfully on the Ascension at the end of the ascension account in the Acts of the Apostles:

Jesus was ascending into heaven and His disciples were still staring into the sky and then two angels appeared, two men in white and they said: “men of Galilee, don’t stand there looking up into heaven. He will come back the same way you have seen Him go”. Now, you go and do what He did. You go and do all you can to bring

heaven and earth together. And that is why the Ascension of the Lord is so important for the Church. It is the commissioning of the Church to do its great work.

But we need to keep in mind that while doing His work on earth, we have to make sure that we bring out the best in everyone. And that is our mission. Let me conclude my homily with a little incident in which how a mother firmly communicated this message to her young son.

Well, the story took place in the mid-1950s. Clement J. Connolly was just 19. And his family then lived in London. As a teenager, he loved driving and, he used to drive around in one of those mini cars: a mini Austin. And he zipped around the traffic and it was wonderful, adventurous, fun for a young person. And as you would know seat belts were not obliged by law those days. And so, one day, he was out driving with his mother. And while cruising along very peacefully, some reckless driver cut him off. Young Connolly wouldn't give up. He threw the car into second and he went around. He zipped on and zipped on and got ahead of him. His mother was furious, not because he endangered her life which he actually did. And she had this to tell him: "Clement, you were wrong; you should not have done that". And Clement said: "No, he was

wrong, he cut me off first”. And his Mom said: “No, you were wrong”. And he repeated: “No he’s wrong”. Then she said: You brought out the worst in him. You could have brought out the best in him which you didn’t. Any time, you bring out the worst in another person, you’re wrong. It doesn’t matter how right you think you’re.

Well! Dear brothers and sisters, the ascension basically calls us to open our hearts to new ways that Jesus wants to be present to us today, to the surprising ways that the Holy Spirit can work in our lives even in the most unfortunate and most difficult circumstances, and to bring out the best in people even when we feel it is not conducive to do so.

Let us then resolve this day dear friends to be Christians with a passion for shedding the light of Christ wherever we are. And let us pray that we may be able to go forth from this place in peace and love for He walks with us all our days. God bless you all, **Amen.**