



## **Solemnity of the Ascension**

### **Homily**

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Sunday 24 May 2020  
St Mary's Cathedral Presbytery**

One of the great joys I have had in my priestly life and ministry, has been the opportunity to teach theology to many committed lay people and seminarians, both in Melbourne and here in Perth where I taught theology at Notre Dame University for four years.

Although I never taught courses on the liturgy I often used to refer to a saying, in Latin, which I hoped would help my students understand that there was, or should be, an unbreakable connection between the way we pray as Catholics, what we believe as Catholics, and how we live as Catholics. The Latin phrase – *lex orandi, lex credenda, lex vivendi* – really means that the way we pray as Catholics gives expression to what we believe and what we believe is supposed to influence the way we live.

Many of us may not have had the opportunity, or even the inclination, to study theology, but we still have full access to the faith of the Church simply by praying in fidelity to our Catholic traditions and in communion with our brothers and sisters. This is especially true, of course, when we come to the celebration of the Eucharist which is at the heart of our faith and of our lives as Catholics. While some of us may not have realised it before, these weeks in which we have been deprived of the opportunity to come together for Mass have awakened in many of us an unexpected hunger for the Eucharist. If so our faith is alive and well, and firmly grounded.

The Eucharistic prayers, of course, are at the centre of the Mass and it is within them that we find the faith of the Church so clearly expressed. In relation to today's feast of the Ascension, the Third Eucharistic prayer, which I will pray this morning, contains these words:

*Therefore, O Lord, as we celebrate the memorial of the saving passion of your Son, his wondrous Resurrection and Ascension into heaven, and as we look forward to his second coming, we offer you in thanksgiving this holy and living sacrifice.*

We often presume, I think, that the Eucharist is the memorial of the passion and death of Jesus and, of course, it is. But the Third Eucharistic Prayer reminds us that it is also the memorial of the Lord's Resurrection and of his return to his Father in heaven. This is what we mean when we speak of the Easter mystery of our salvation. The suffering, the death, the rising and the return to his Father are one continuous saving work of Jesus which is then, of course, made available to us through the coming of



the Holy Spirit and the enlivening of the Church which we will celebrate next week on Pentecost Sunday. We are still caught up, therefore, in the joy and hope of Easter.

Today's feast of the Ascension sheds particular light on a vital part of our faith in the salvation which Jesus offers us. The return of Jesus to his Father in heaven, whom Jesus himself has taught us to call **our** Father, shows us that as human beings we belong in heaven. It is our home; it is the destination to which God is inviting us; it is the place where we will finally be fully at home and at peace. When Jesus, who was and is the presence of God among us as one of us, finally returned to the Father, he took our human nature with him. The man Jesus, who was and is at the same time the eternal God, returned to his Father to take his rightful place, and in doing so claimed heaven as the natural and rightful home of every human being. Heaven, if I can put it this way, is uniquely hospitable to us as human beings, because it is the true home of Jesus, who took on our humanity – became one with us - so that we could share his divinity – become one with him. God has made us for himself and his love is calling to us - and all that is good in us and all that we love we will carry with us as we journey towards our home with God.

God does not, of course, ask us to live our lives as if all that matters is our future with him in heaven: rather he asks us to live our lives now, in this world, with integrity, with fidelity, with enthusiasm and with love. The world is a precious gift to us and we are called to receive and accept this gift with gratitude: it is the place in which we will find God, come to know him and be able to serve him. Even more the people we love are precious gifts from God whom we are called to love and cherish. In loving them we learn to love God and this love we will carry with us into our home in heaven. Just as Jesus lived a life of love, of generous self-giving and of joy in God's creation, so we too are asked to do the same. In his human nature Jesus carried everything he cherished with him when he returned to his Father through his ascension into heaven. In that sense he carried us with him too, for he loves and cherishes us. The way we live our lives, and the way we love, will also determine what we carry with us when we, too, come to the place Jesus has prepared for us.

Today's feast, then, invites us to always have one eye fixed on heaven, and at the same time to live each day of our lives as a precious and wonderful gift from God through which we are preparing ourselves, and those we love, for all that God has in store for us. As Saint Paul puts it "*our homeland is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ*" (Phil 3:20). Our belief in the eternal life which God offers us is the source of our hope and also of our desire to live our lives now with generosity, with enthusiasm and with love.

At the end of Mass this morning, and in anticipation of tomorrow's feast of Mary Help of Christians, I will pray a special prayer entrusting our archdiocese and our country to Mary at this time of crisis in relation to the Covid 19 pandemic. All the other bishops around the country will be doing the same. It is because of Mary's Assumption into heaven, her full sharing in the Resurrection and Ascension of her Son, that we can be confident in making this act of entrustment. She lives with the Lord in the joy of eternal life, and she shares with him his love, concern and compassion for us. And, of course, where Mary has gone we hope to follow. In asking Mary to pray for us we are really asking her to unite her own prayers



to those of her Son who, as scripture assures us, *“not only died for us but the rose from the dead and (now), at God’s right hand, stands and pleads for us”* (Rom 8:34).

May Mary’s prayers, united to those of her Son, and our prayers, united to hers and to her Son’s, bring courage, hope, compassion and healing to us all.