

## SOLEMNITY OF THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD “A”

MAY 24, 2020

As Pope, St. John Paul II devoted his weekly General Audiences in St. Peter’s Square and (during the winter months) the Paul VI Audience Hall from September 5, 1979 to November 28, 1984 to 129 lectures on his philosophical and theological work, *The Theology of the Body*. John Paul’s work is the basis of many dioceses (including our own) as part of the formation process for couples preparing for the Sacrament of Matrimony.

The central thesis of *Theology of the Body* is that the human body is a “sacrament” of God. Through human flesh and blood God, who is invisible, is seen, speaks, and works through this, the last and greatest, work of divine creation. John Paul’s *Theology of the Body* teaches that our humanity, our flesh and blood, are sacred, are, in fact, a sign/symbol/sacrament through which God has, and continues, to reveal his divine and active presence in the world.

What has this to do with today’s feast of the Ascension? Everything!

Jesus’ Ascension is not just about the end of his post-resurrection appearances. As Jesus’ glorified human body disappears from human sight, it reveals the truth of our physical body. Jesus’ Ascension reveals both what our human body is already as well as our body’s eventual transformation in the image and model of the risen and ascended Jesus. St. Paul teaches us that that through faith and baptism we have died and risen with Jesus (Rm. 6) Our life--body and soul--are a “temple of the Holy Spirit” (I Cor. 3). (As a footnote, this is why in Masses where incense is used after the gifts of bread and wine have been prepared they are honored with incense and then all of us are also honored with incense. As the gifts of bread and wine [symbols of ourselves and our work] will become transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, so, we too, through partaking of them in Holy Communion, are also “transubstantiated” more and more through the Holy Spirit as the body of Christ. This is also why in a funeral mass, the final sign of farewell to the body or remains of a deceased member is honored with incense.) Because of this, we are, St. Paul reminds us, to “glorify God in our bodies.” The Christian life is not solely about “saving my soul”. Soul (spirit) and body are a unity. Today’s feast of the Ascension completes what was begun at Christmas in the mystery of the Incarnation, the human

enfleshment of God. This is also the basis of the body of the Church's teaching on the sacredness of human life from conception to natural death and on issues of social justice promoting the dignity and flowering of human life and societies

In today's Gospel the risen Lord commissions his disciples to go out to all nations, making disciples, teaching and baptizing them. Jesus has not abandoned us. Physically absent from us as an individual human being, he lives personally and corporately in us through the Holy Spirit. We now are the person of Jesus in and for the world. Jesus reminds us in the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, that at the last judgment each of us will be evaluated by how well or ill, we treated the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless, the immigrant, the prisoner, the sick, the dying, the physically and spiritually poor, who were the special focus of Jesus while he walked this earth.

A picture on a page of my desk calendar back in January showed the turnstiles in a subway station leading down the stairs or escalators to the trains. At the top of stairs was the sign EXIT. It's a good image for today's celebration. Today we are sent forth to carry the person and mission of Jesus in our bodies to our families, community and world.

Go and announce the Gospel!

24 May, 2020  
Father Jim Secora