



ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, May 14th, 2026)

Intuerentur in caelum.
They were gazing into heaven.
(Acts 1:10)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

FORTY DAYS ago, we were startled, with the holy women, with Peter and John, before the rolled-away stone and the empty tomb. Soon, the visible presence of Christ came to console us. He is truly risen. He had foretold it. Today, Christ withdraws from the sight of His disciples. He disappears into the clouds. The Paschal candle has just been extinguished. Its flame, drawn from the Paschal fire, illuminated and warmed the first part of Eastertide. It reminded us of the Lord's resurrection, His presence with the apostles. That presence is no more.

Therefore, joy does not seem to be the primary focus of the feast of the Ascension. It marks the end of a chapter in human history; a chapter that began on the day of the Annunciation, when the Angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would conceive a son; a chapter confirmed in the eyes of the shepherds, the Wise Men, Simeon, and Anna, by the birth of the foretold child on the night of the first Christmas. Finally, this chapter closed after approximately thirty-three years during

which the Son of God, God made man, remained among mankind, Emmanuel.

After the suffering of the Passion, joy was reborn on Easter morning. Jesus appeared to his followers: “Peace be with you.” The chief priests, Pilate and the cohort, the Golgotha, had receded far away. After an unprecedented outpouring of hatred, after the disciples’ turmoil, after their betrayal, peace was now reigning in their hearts. The time had come for the final teachings. For the disciples, little by little, light was dawning.

But what about us who have not seen Jesus, who must believe without having seen? Are we better off than our brothers who lived under the first Covenant, before Christ was made flesh? Are we condemned to wander in the world, to live our lives day by day like the pilgrims of Emmaus, sorrowful?

A few rather surprising signs prevent us from giving in to sadness too quickly.

First, there is the behaviour of the apostles. We remember their dismay on the evening of Good Friday. Here, on the contrary, once the Lord has left them, they return “with great joy”^a to Jerusalem. Without delay, after being blessed by Christ as He was ascending into heaven, they go to the Temple where they continually bless God. Fear seems to have left them.

Yet the Lord has given them a mission, a daunting and overwhelming mission: “Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature.”^b The whole world, every creature... How could such words not have crushed the disciples, seemingly abandoned by their Master? Couldn’t the Master have taken this evangelization upon Himself?

No, the disciples’ once wavering faith seems firm, and probably because the Lord had added concerning those who would receive baptism:

And these signs will accompany those who believe: in My name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any

deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.^c

c. vv. 17–18.

This presence of the Lord among the newly baptized and the disciples, which is manifested through signs, is summarized by St. Matthew after he has recalled the Lord's words sending the apostles on mission: "And behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world."^d

d. Mt 28:20.

In other words, the Ascension is the feast of Christ who departs, but above all, that of Christ who remains.

This feast marks the beginning of a time of waiting. Christ has promised the coming of the Paraclete, which is also directly linked to the mission:

But you shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even to the uttermost part of the earth.^e

e. Acts 1:8.

Last, there is an element reported by the book of Acts:

All these were persevering with one mind in prayer with the women, and Mary the Mother of Jesus, and with His brethren.^f

f. Acts 1:14.

How distant now seems the time when the Lord had to gather disciples with opinions so different from His own, disciples who wondered who was the greatest among them.

Ultimately, the lasting image of this Ascension feast is not so much that of Christ departing, but that of the disciples remaining, their gaze fixed on the Lord. He is no longer there, and two men in white will remind them of this. He is no longer there, and yet the disciples' eyes remain fixed on Him.

From this final glance springs the joy of the disciples. In this glance, our joy and the joy of the Church are also reborn. St. Luke specifies that "whilst He blessed them, He departed from them and was carried up to heaven."^g It is therefore Christ blessing them, Whom we must carry in our hearts as the viaticum for a truly persevering and hopeful Christian life.

g. Lk 24:51.

It is Christ blessing them, Whom we must also proclaim to the world.

The parenthesis mentioned above has therefore not closed, or if it has, it is only to open again. The antiphon of the *Magnificat* subtly underlines this:

O King of glory, Lord of hosts, Who on this day art raised in triumph to the highest heavens, leave us not orphans: but send us Him whom the Father has promised, the Spirit of truth. Alleluia.

The exclamation that opens this antiphon, which is one of the Lord's titles, as well as its melody, remind us of the seven *O* antiphons, the *Magnificat* antiphons of the seven days preceding the Nativity of the Lord, which implore His coming. Here the word *Veni*, "Come", has disappeared, to be replaced by *Mitte*, "Send forth the Holy Spirit."

Our joy is at its peak. Not only does the Lord remain with us and bless us, but He also announces to us the coming of the Spirit, the One promised by the Father.

During the novena that is beginning, let us implore the intercession of Mary, let us ask for an abundant outpouring of the Spirit upon ourselves, upon our communities and our families, upon the Church.

Veni Sancte Spiritus. Amen, Alleluia.

