

**Homily – Luke 24: 46 -53**  
**Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord**  
**28 / 29 May 2022 – Sooeey / Riverstown**

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It was during his battle with terminal cancer in 1922 that Giacomo Puccini began to write *Turandot*, an opera which many now consider his best work. He worked on the score day and night, despite the advice of his friends asking him to rest, and to save his energy. When his sickness worsened, Puccini said to his disciples, “If I don’t finish *Turandot*, I want you to finish it.” Well, he died in 1924, leaving the work unfinished. Now, his disciples gathered all that was written of *Turandot*, studied it in great detail, and then proceeded to write the remainder of the opera. It was completed by Franco Alfano. The world premier was performed in La Scala Opera House in Milan in 1926, and Arturo Toscanini, Puccini’s favorite student, conducted it. The opera went beautifully. When Toscanini came to the end of the part written by Puccini, he stopped the music, put down the baton, turned to the audience, and announced, “Thus far the master wrote, but then he died.” There was a long pause; no one moved. Then Toscanini picked up the baton, turned to the audience and, with tears in his eyes, announced, “But his disciples finished his work.” The opera closed to thunderous applause, and to a permanent place in the annals of great works.

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 Gospel of today would tell us that, with His return to the Father, Jesus completes His mission on earth. But just before His Ascension, Jesus entrusted to the disciples the mission of preaching the Good News and evangelizing the whole world by bearing witness to Him through their lives. It is in the Ascension that we see Jesus entering fully into the life and glory of God.

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

Now, Luke comes out so powerfully on the ascension at the end of the ascension account in his 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. And that’s the significance of this feast for each of us.

Fr. Pedro Arrupe, who was once the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, narrates how he personally met Jesus and decided to follow Him.

Well, Pedro was a brilliant student of medicine, winning many prizes in anatomical studies and therapeutics at the University of Madrid. Everyone predicted he would become a great doctor. In October 1926, nineteen-year-old Pedro went to Lourdes as a volunteer. One day he

accompanied the procession in front of the Grotto, walking beside a mother who was pushing a wheel-chair in which sat her twenty-six-year-old son, a polio victim, his body crippled and completely deformed. The mother kept intoning aloud: “Holy Virgin, come to our aid”. Then the Bishop came with the Blessed Sacrament and made a sign of the cross with it over the boy. At that instant, the boy leapt from his chair, completely cured.

Pedro says: “I returned to Madrid, but the books kept falling from my hands. My fellow students asked me: “What’s happening to you? You seem dazed!” Yes, I was dazed by the memory which upset me more each day; only the image of the Sacred Host raised in blessing and the paralyzed boy jumping up from his chair remained fixed in my heart”, says Pedro.

Three months later, Pedro gave up his studies and entered the Novitiate of the Society of Jesus at Loyola to pursue his studies towards priesthood.

Well, Jesus Christ has accomplished His work, sent the Holy Spirit to watch over the Church and has gone back to the Father. Yet He is ever with us in the form of the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, and the homeless. If we have been truly touched by the Lord, then we should pay heed to His invitation to bear witness to His presence in the world. Let us then dear Brothers and Sisters, ask the guidance of the Spirit of God to bear witness to Jesus by our transparent Christian lives. God bless you all, **Amen.**

