



# Sunday May 17, 2026

## Seventh Sunday of Easter

So, Father Murphy walks into a pub in Donegal and says to the first man that he meets there, "Do you want to go to heaven?" and the man says, "I do Father," and the priest says, "then lead this pub right now." Then he approached the second man. "Do you want to go to heaven?" Certainly, Father was the man's reply. Then leave this den of Satan said the priest, "then he walked up to O'Toole." "Do you want to go to heaven?" "No, I don't Father," O'Toole replied. The priest looked at him right in the eye and said, "You mean to tell me that when you die, you don't want to go to heaven?" "Oh, when I die, yes, Father. I thought you were getting a group to go together to go now."

So, this past Thursday was the official celebration of the ascension of the Lord, the day that Jesus was taken up to heaven. According to the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, which we heard this morning, Jesus appeared to many of his disciples during the 40 days, following his resurrection, and on the 40th day, he appeared again and they went out to the Mount of Olives where he instructed them to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Holy Spirit. And as they were watching, he ascended into the clouds and as they continued to watch angels appeared and declared to them that as he ascended, Jesus would return in glory.

Now for the ordinary Christian like us, Ascension Day seems to pass without much fanfare, huh? We blend the big celebrations like Christmas and Easter, but the ascension of Jesus, the doctrine that Jesus was ascended into heaven on his last day on earth, hardly gets a "mah" from us. The ascension is the forgotten stepchild of the Christian feast days. If anything, our attention seems to be drawn ahead next week to Pentecost, which we will celebrate it, right, next Sunday. But the early church remembered the ascension as a real event, not a metaphor. They told the story over and over again. There were paintings and creeds and early sermons all referred to it. The ascension was a part of how Christian described Christ's work. He was raised from the dead, he ascended, and he sits at the right hand of God. In modern times, the closest we come to understanding ascension might be from those who may be royal enthusiasts among us who talk



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about the ascension of a king or a queen to the throne. Or there are some new agers who describe the ascension of the earth or the individual's soul going from a lower plane to a higher spiritual plane. But on Ascension Day, Christians believe the risen Jesus, raised now into heaven, is crowned with glory and honor. And we proclaim that Jesus ascended to God's right hand and is right now king of kings, Lord of lords, the president of presidents, the prime ministers of prime ministers, he's all. Jesus, we say, on Ascension Day rules, and we mean it in both the traditional and the slang meaning of the world. Jesus rules, but Jesus rules.

Right up to his ascension, Jesus remained connected to his disciples and his earthly ministry. We recall how when Jesus began his ministry, he spent 40 days tempted by the devil in the desert. Now in the same way, at the end of Jesus' ministry, he spends his last 40 days on earth wrapping things trying to tell the disciples what to be prepared for, how things are going to move on, that he was returning to the Father God. So, he spent those precious final days preparing his disciples to carry on the ministry of good news and reconciliation. So, when Jesus ascended, he wasn't abandoning his disciples or us. Remember the scripture from last week, I will not leave you orphans? Well, he was good to his word. The ascension was a sign. Jesus was exalted. And from the letters of Paul, we hear that ascension tells us Jesus is now ruling and seated at the right hand of God. A phrase that means honor, authority, and power. The resurrection proved he has life and the ascension proves he has authority over all heavens and earth. Jesus' physical, visible presence changed. He was no longer in a single place walking with his disciples along the country road. This might feel like a loss, but it opened the way for his presence to be everywhere through the Holy Spirit. Because at Pentecost, which we will celebrate next week, the Spirit came and filled the people. So, Christ's presence was no longer limited to one body in one place. He is present now with us in the Spirit. The ascension makes it possible for God's Spirit to fall on them, on us, and empower us to become his witnesses. The power of the reign of God is about to unfold in and around them to equip them for their work. So, the ascension was key, a stepping stone for the disciples to understand that Jesus was not an earthly king, but the king of the cosmos and



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their marching orders that Jesus gave them was not the conquest of land or conquering foreign rulers, but the triumph of the human heart in love and righteousness, in the planting of peace and justice here on earth. At the heart of the ascension is the mandate to send the church out. Jesus told the disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit because they would become witnesses to the ends of the earth. The mission of the church begins in that in-between time, between the ascension and his return. We, the body of Christ, continues his work on earth. The ascension is that make us spectators, it makes us participants.

So, what do we do in this in-between time? We exercise Christ's authority to love, to serve, and to be faithful and true. We stand against injustice. We comfort the hurting and speak the good news. And for those who suffer, for those who are tempted, for those of us who are anxious, the ascension reminds us that God is a God of all grace. He's called us to the eternal glory in Christ and will restore, support, strengthen, and establish us. So, here on earth as well and as in heaven, God lifts us up and gives us a glimpse of that glory. Heaven is open wide, but not for us to stand gazing as the disciples were tempted to do, but for us to bring that heaven down to earth and to spread that gospel, that kingdom here in our midst. Even good words indeed that we do in Jesus Christ, brings the reality of the ascension here to earth. We do not have to wait to die to begin to experience heaven. Glimpses of heaven can be gained not by staring blankly at the sky like the disciples were initially, but by creating it in word indeed following Jesus. As we are lifted up by love, let us seek in our every day to bring a little bit of heaven here to earth. Let us not seek to reestablish old visions, old memories, but let us be renewed and view our world and what's all around us through the eyes of our ascended Lord. And may we make that vision of a new heaven and a new earth and proclaim it boldly, as Jesus did, and make that a reality in our world. Amen.