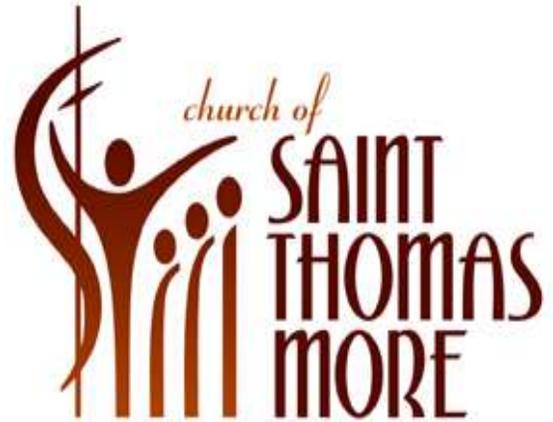


Ascension

Not many years ago, we celebrated the Ascension of the Lord on a Thursday, 40 days after Easter Sunday. It has since been moved in the Diocese of Phoenix and elsewhere to the 7th Sunday of Easter.

Ascension is the first of two great feasts that occur in the closing weeks of the Easter season. We commemorate Jesus' Ascension into heaven, and the following week, we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. These two feasts are directly connected, for as we hear Jesus promise in the Pentecost Gospel, he will be going away, but he would return and the Holy Spirit, whom the Father would send in his name, would be with us to teach us and remind us of all Jesus told us.



In marking the Ascension on the 40th day of the Easter season, the church took literally Luke's account of events in Acts 1:3. Even though the accounts of the Ascension in the Gospels suggest it took place after a shorter period of time, the church had honored the timeline from Acts by celebrating the Ascension on Thursday of the sixth week of Easter. However, concern that the Thursday celebration kept many of the faithful from keeping this holy day of obligation prompted Rome to allow the feast to be moved to the following Sunday, because every Sunday is a holy day of obligation.

In the United States, approval to transfer the feast was obtained in 1999. By decree of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, authority to implement the change was granted to the bishops of a particular region. While most of the U.S. made the change, some parts of the country have not. So it is possible for Ascension to be on a Thursday in one state and on a Sunday in another!

Celebrating the Ascension on a Sunday of the Easter season puts this solemnity in its rightful orientation. The Ascension is not a "farewell", nor a time of sadness at Jesus' departure from this world. The earlier practice of extinguishing the paschal candle on this day is therefore quite inappropriate. Like every Christian festival, the Ascension celebrates the on-going presence of the risen Christ in our midst.

The Preface of the Ascension (I) provides a rich insight into this feast:

*"Christ the mediator between God and the human race,
judge of the world and Lord of all,
has passed beyond our sight,
not to abandon us - but to be our hope.
Christ is the beginning, the head of the Church;
where he has gone, we hope to follow."*

What we celebrate is not a past event or the hope of our own glorious future destiny, but the life we share **now** with the risen Lord.

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