

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio
Solemnity of the Ascension
2015 Memorial Mass



Two vignettes might orient our celebration this year: last November leaving the Basilica of the Assumption in Baltimore at the conclusion of the opening concelebration for the Bishops' fall assembly, a man across the street was blaring out of a megaphone a fundamentalist attack on the beliefs of Catholics. Bishop Higgins was close to me and he said: the people we serve put their lives on the line so that he is free to do that. Imagine what would happen elsewhere if he were to attack religious beliefs.

I have often thought of those words of my senior Auxiliary Bishop in my visits around the world to men and women who sacrifice so much in the name of freedom. They came to mind—and this is the second vignette-- on Thursday in Lourdes as I spent time with those participating in the 57th International Military Pilgrimage. I talked to the wounded in mind and body and others who have lived all over the globe so that you and I might profess our faith, plan our future, and, yes, speak on the public square with a megaphone.

That is why we are here this afternoon, because we know that freedom is not free and we must invoke divine blessings on the fallen, on those who survive, on those who serve our nation here and abroad, and on those who still bear in body and spirit the price of their service to a greater goal.

The Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, today's feast, bids us consider our participation in the mission of the Church, which is made possible by our transformation in the footprints of the Lord. In that context we honor those who have died, who suffer, and mourn. Our working and tiring ourselves should guide us to rest with Christ in heaven. Our way of life, of suffering, and of dying, should clearly manifest that the mystery of the Redemption is being realized in us.

There is no question that gathered in this Basilica on the Ascension our gaze is drawn upward. I can still remember my first visit to this sanctuary in 1961 on Ascension Thursday and how my gaze was riveted to the image of Christ in the apse. Today we contemplate Jesus glorified and seated at the right hand of the Father, but we also recognize the mandate for dynamic action vividly communicated in the passage from the

Acts of the Apostles. “More than looking to heaven, the question is establishing a link between heaven and earth.”¹

The second book of Luke’s Gospel stresses the importance of Apostolic authority, but the plan for those who listen to the call of Almighty God has not changed since Abraham: he leaves home –full of confidence in the Lord’s promise, but remains open to the Spirit. There are expectations.

We hear it again as St. Paul reminds the Ephesians and us that our vocation is characterized by unity. We are charged to be catalysts for “building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God...” (Eph. 4:13).

Our daily conduct allows us to offer to the world the image of a Church conformed to the Father’s plan. The Incarnation of Christ reveals the magnificence of human potential and the variety of gifts. Insertion into Christ is always an invitation to realize the greatness of our vocation, despite the restrictions that others might place on our shoulders. Remember that Paul writes his Letter to the Ephesians from prison. The constraints of the civil authorities of his time cannot chain the Gospel. Nor will they be able to do so in ours. You and I must live in that hope and continue to preach Jesus Christ in and out of season. Can we not draw strength from the Risen Lord to recycle in love every disagreeable thing in everyday existence?

In the end, love is the miraculous black stone which can neutralize the lethal effects of certain negative wags and draw from wounds a source of grace. It is the ability to replace the venom of opposition, rampant secularism, and divisiveness with fidelity to the truth, a certain warmth and harmony. That same love responds to the smallness, attacks, and dirty tricks with magnanimity.²

Do we not hear that clearly in the second conclusion to the Gospel of Mark? Each one of us is sent on mission so that every person might hear the good news of the Resurrection, adhere to Jesus Christ, and experience salvation through faith and baptism....In His Name evil can be overcome and illness healed. There is a clear tension: entrance into glory, but presence with His own. The Church of every time continues His living, active, and saving presence. The Ascension is not an end, but a new beginning.

Pope Benedict XVI told us that the Ascension “expresses our belief that in Christ the humanity that we all share has entered into the inner life of God in a new and hitherto unheard of way. It means that the human person has found an everlasting place in God...Jesus Himself is what we call heaven.”³

Still it is hard to avoid looking up in the celebration of the Ascension—even despite the counsel of the men in white. We lift up our hearts, look heavenward, and transfer our attention to where Christ is at the right of the Father. It is a solemnity that reveals, even now, our belonging to the heavenly Jerusalem, which is also the substance of our prayer

¹ Pronzato, *Il Vangelo in Casa*, ciclo B, p. 145.

² Cf. *ibid.*, p. 146.

³ Pope Benedict XVI, homily at Cassino, 24.V.2009.

for those who died after service to our country. We live in heaven with our heart, but our bodies have yet to arrive.

To the extent that we die with Christ, we ascend and become liberated from the slavery to sin and, thus, more human. The wait for the glorious Christ can seem long, painful, and tedious when we limit our gaze to the sad pages of history or contemporary society. We must cultivate, like the early Christians, the sense of immanence. That tension exists between losing sight and knowing how to gather our brothers and sisters in their need, filling their emptiness.

That is why we pray for those who died on battlefields, those Veterans who have passed from this life since last Memorial Day, those who mourn and suffer the emptiness that comes from losing a loved one, and those who carry with them the burdens of their service. As an Archdiocese we also pray for all of those who serve our Country abroad in diplomatic and other missions. As a community of faith we cannot fail to lift those petitions up to a loving Father in this perfect prayer. I also include all of those intentions that have been sent to the Archdiocese for this celebration and will be carried to the altar in the offertory procession.

Can we fail to include the late Archbishop Dimino, who ended his earthly pilgrimage last November? He always prayed for us and now we pray for his eternal rest. We ask him to be our intercessor before the Throne of Grace.

“They went forth and preached everywhere while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.” So ends the Gospel of Mark. Pope Francis insists that the Church is ever on mission to accompany all women and men to an encounter with the Risen Lord. The miracle of proclaiming the Gospel in different tongues means to give voice to the message of truth in different ways. “Does not speaking a new tongue consist essentially in discovering the entry point for each person?”⁴

That is our prayer this afternoon as we join ourselves to those who completed the International Military Pilgrimage in Lourdes. May the preaching communicated in the action of our lives be more eloquent and effective than the shouts of the man with the megaphone!

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 147.