

# The Ascension and our Christian Vocation

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**“Wow! That is an awesome story!”** This is the response that I usually get whenever I share my vocation story, telling of how I migrated to the United States from my native Nigeria without any intention of becoming a religious or priest, how my initial response then to the perceived vocation was a firm, **“Heck no!”** I tell of how Jesus’ love for me and the example and presence of Mary eventually prevailed over my resistance to this vocation, how the grace of God kept me going throughout the period of seminary life, the many joys and pains of the vocation, and how I found myself now as a religious priest and missionary in the Philippines.

The usual response of amazement to my vocation story always leaves me with a spirit of deep gratitude to God for calling me and giving me the grace to respond to His call. But it also leaves me wondering, **“What will make my vocation story complete or perfect?”** We all have amazing stories of our vocation, how God has touched us and called us to marriage, consecrated life, single life, or just to a deeper relationship with Him. What will make our vocation story complete or perfect? Is it how long we stay faithful or the sacrifices involved? Is it our successes or accomplishments or the obstacles that we overcome?

St. John’s account of Jesus’ Resurrection shows us that, after all is said and done, our vocation story is never complete or perfect until we forever come face to face with the One who called us in love. Jesus Christ, after all the amazing things that He said and did, after overcoming the evil and hatred in the hearts of His executioners, and after conquering the grave and rising from the dead, did not permit Mary Magdalene to hold on to Him but spoke of the necessity of His visible Ascension from this world: **“Stop holding on to me for I have not yet ascended to the Father.”** (Jn 20:17) Jesus did not regard His own story as complete or perfect until He brought His glorious humanity to the face of His heavenly Father.

St. Luke shares the story of Jesus with Theophilus in the Acts of the Apostles. His account does not end at the instructions of Jesus or the suffering and death of Jesus or the **“many proofs”** by which the Risen Jesus showed Himself alive to the disciples for forty days. He shows us how Christ’s vocation story culminated at His glorious Ascension: **“I dealt with all that Jesus did and taught until the day He was taking up.”** The Ascension of Jesus into glory and His exaltation at His Father’s right hand is the climax of Jesus’ obedient

mission of love. Likewise, our vocation story will be incomplete until we see God face to face forever.

The good news is that we begin now to enjoy the gifts of Christ's glorious Ascension. First, by the Ascension of Jesus, His glorious body is no longer limited by space and time. Thus we can make life-giving contact with the risen Christ in every place, time and condition. St. Mark tells us in the Gospel that after Jesus was "taken up into heaven and took His seat at the right hand of God," the disciples "went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs." In all times and place, we can surely draw grace and life-giving examples from Jesus, "the faithful witness." (Rev 1:5)

Secondly, the glorious body of Christ is filled with the power of the Holy Spirit for the sake of constant and consistent witnessing. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." In and through this Spirit, we can respond to the call to holiness and offer ourselves to God just like Jesus Christ did: "Jesus Christ through the eternal Spirit offered Himself to the Father." (Heb 9:14) By virtue of the Ascension of Christ, we have access to the presence and action of Jesus Christ and a participation in the Holy Spirit so that we never lack what we need for faithful witness to Him in all times, conditions and places here on earth and thus journey to His glorious face-to-face communion.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, how easy it is for us to forget that we have a heavenly vocation and not just to be successful priests, lay or consecrated men and women? We have a grave vocation to be holy, faithful witnesses of God's love here on earth and being in His beatifying presence for all eternity. Our personal sins and sufferings, the burdens and challenges of daily life, the passing joys of this life and our suffering world all combine to dim the greatness of our vocation to holiness here on earth and heavenly glory.

Are we waiting for an opportune day or place or condition to respond to this call? Have we grown weary or bogged down by failures and difficulties? The feast of the Ascension reminds us that the God who called us to our respective vocations, by virtue of the glorious Christ and a participation of His Spirit, never ceases to draw us to see Him face to face eternally because we belong to Him: "For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." (Rom7:8)

St. Paul reminds the Christians in Ephesus of what they have from the Holy Spirit. They have "knowledge of God" as loving Father, they are enlightened

to know “the hope that belongs to His call” and the “riches of glory in His inheritance among the holy ones,” and the “surpassing greatness of His power for us who believe.” Through the Holy Spirit, they will know that God showed the greatness of His might through the Ascension by “raising Christ from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavens.” This same power of the Holy Spirit is available to us today for faithful witness.

One way that we can begin to experience these amazing gifts of the Ascension is through loving devotion to Mary as the Spouse of the Holy Spirit. I recall the moments of hesitation before embracing my vocation and the fears that I had then. I knew that I would need lots of help and graces to embark on that vocation. I remember turning to Mother Mary and saying with all honesty, “Mary, I need lots of help. If you are not going to come with me every step of the way, just leave me alone now.” She has proven more than equal to the task of completing my vocation story. As beloved daughter of the Father, she lets us share her loving knowledge of God and the hope that comes from being in relationship with Him. As Queen assumed into heaven, she instills hope in us that we will have what we need to walk faithfully in witness to Christ to the very end. As our Mother who witnessed the amazing power of the Holy Spirit to form the God-man in her womb, she instill in us also a sense of God’s power to overcome all odds on earth and bring us into His presence in the life to come.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our vocation stories are still unfolding, beautiful as they may be. As we encounter Christ in this Eucharist, the One who is not limited by time or space, whose Spirit moves us to faithful witness to God’s love in all times, places and conditions, no matter what the past has been or the present may present to us, we persevere in our journey back to the One who loved us and called us.

Let us give profound thanks to Jesus Christ, risen and glorified by the Father, for calling and gracing us to be His disciples. Let us also beg for the grace to be like Mary, open to the grace of the Holy Spirit to bear witness to Him always and everywhere until our vocation story is complete and perfect when we come to see Him and the Father and the Holy Spirit, the One God who calls us, face to face.