

Homily: Fr. Larry Richardt  
May 21, 2023  
The Ascension of the Lord  
30:46-43:58

Year after year, this day of Ascension rolls around on our church calendar. We call it a solemnity, which means of course, that we celebrate in a special way. We do have trouble celebrating this feast, however, particularly if we get all tangled-up in the mechanics of the event.

The “hows” have a way of blinding us to God’s truth and meaning. For example, in the Gospel of John, the story of Nicodemus is a case in point. Nicodemus came down with a severe case of “hows.” How can I enter the womb again of my mother? How can I be born anew – when I am already a senior citizen? So being so concerned about the mechanics can happen to us here at the Ascension, if – if “how” is our primary concern.

The Ascension becomes only a fantastic feat, a cosmic trick. To dwell on how the Ascension happened will only turn into a biblical sideshow, complete with wires and mirrors. And we could speculate forever on what happened and never figure it out.

But that’s the point, my friends. That’s the point. We’re not supposed to figure it out. What God is interested in is *what are we going to do* in response to such an event. The Ascension of our Lord, a solemnity. What does it mean? What did it mean to the disciples? What does it mean to us?

The Ascension is about endings and beginnings. It is about joy, sorrow, hope. For the ministry of Jesus here on earth had ended. Jesus had taken up the cup prepared for him as he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. The time had now come for him to return to the One who had sent him and to take his place at the right hand of our God.

Now you and I can assent and accept the truth of this event. But why such a dramatic exit? Ultimately, only God knows. We'll know when we get to heaven, too. But it seems that it has something to do with "finality."

If not Jesus, who? If not Jesus, who is going to carry on the witness of God's love and compassion and mercy and intervention in human life? Who?

This dramatic parting proclaimed, then, in a very vivid way that Jesus with us in human form is now ended. Out of sight; out of mind? No. How about absence makes the heart grow fonder? No. That doesn't explain it either. Neither cliché fits. For it is not Jesus' absence, but his presence that makes our heart grow fonder. Who?

We are the witnesses now. And so the Ascension signals the beginning of a new kind of reign of Christ Jesus here on earth, through us. Jesus has left the boundaries of time and space and has taken his place with God. The Ascension is not something to cry about, but rather something to cause joy. *Nothing* now, as Paul writes, *can separate us from God's love*. So, who?

The Ascension means that Jesus is with us in a more profound sense. Jesus is with us when we gather – two or three in his name. Jesus is with us when we proclaim the Word. Jesus is with us when we share bread broken, wine poured out. Jesus is with us as Savior as we offer others compassion, mercy, forgiveness, love. So that's why we're gathered this morning.

We are not here to just sit and reflect upon the vacuum created by Jesus' exit from the Earth. We are here to celebrate a feast in honor of the crucified, risen, and ascended Jesus who is with us - Matthew reminds us – until the end of the age.

It is now we who are invited into God's work here on earth. Today we have every reason then, to be joyful and full of thanks on this feast, a time to make Eucharist, to give thanks.

And today we celebrate one of our brothers' response to enter into that divine work as a presbyter among us. Forty years ago, this very day, May 21<sup>st</sup>, our brother heard his name called out, "Richard Martin Ginther." And he answered, "Present!" Thus, one phase of Rick's journey for the Martin and Ellen Ginther family, one of seven siblings, began. A new phase.

From the parish of Saint Andrew, here in Indianapolis, to the Latin School, then on to Saint Meinrad College and Theology. With a detour of six years after second theology, to be a teacher in the Junior High at St. Jude's parish, here in Indianapolis. And part-time work in the State of Indiana's Division of Addictions. This latter job shortly became full time.

After a while, Rick returned to the study of theology, completing his MDiv at the Athenaeum of Ohio, and was ordained presbyter May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1983.

Now the bio data given in the Archdiocesan Directory – if you want to get on the internet – and look up the Archdiocese of Indianapolis – it's quite lengthy, actually. (holding up a copy of the page) It actually takes up almost a whole page. So Rick has had a variety of assignments in the Archdiocese, leading to all sorts of situations where his skill of ministry is called for.

At his 25<sup>th</sup>, I asked the question that maybe we all ask when we celebrate an anniversary. Is it really 25 – in this case 40 – years of ministry? Or one year of ministry repeated 40 times? Well, if you read this (referring to the biography in the Archdiocesan Directory), no. That's not the story of Father Rick.

So, these ministries have led him on a great journey. It continues, thank goodness. You know, Rick was blessed with an ability to pay attention, especially to details. Again, many of us have experienced his detailed chart of where to stand when we have been ministers of Holy Communion. (Holding up such a chart) A very nice big one and if you have a chance, there's even numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 – on the tiles of the sanctuary. So. No mistakes, please.

But this paying attention began early, as he observed the pastors and the associates of St. Andrew Parish here in Indianapolis. Fathers Matt Harold, Paul Landwerlen, Clarence Walden, Dick Mode, Bill Fisher, Jerry Gettlefinger, Tom Widner, Ed Kirch. Fathers Jim Farrell and Bob Scheidler and Bernie Head, Cliff Vogelsang also left their mark on Rick's pastoral homiletic and teaching style. And three other priests noted on this journey as he has mentioned many times of his faith and ministry, were Fathers Joe Kern, Dick Lawler and Giles Pater.

For more of his own understanding of what his ministry has been, be sure to look at his column and his reflection in the Weekly Newsletter, as well as his reflection in the Bulletin. Particularly pay attention to the one about, "What Is a Priest?" And I think all of us who are priests, those of us who are up here – Father Joe Moriarty, who is rector of Simon Brute' College Seminary, and then of course, Father Nick Dant, whom you know – we would ask you to please keep this in mind. That we are not angels sent from heaven. We are men, chosen from among you and are members of the Church. We are Christians, and so we remain that.

But along the way, all of the people: priests, lay people, siblings, mother, dad, grandparents, nieces and nephews, we are all formed by that. And it marks who we are as priests of God.

So with grateful thanks we celebrate Father Richard Martin Ginther's faithful ordained liturgy among us for these 40 years. But as you and I pay attention to him, like Matthew and St. Luke as well in the Acts says, don't forget. Don't forget. We also celebrate everyone's participation in God's work. God has summoned us to the glory of now being called a Chosen Nation, a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation, a People of Your Own Possession, to proclaim your mighty works. Go out into the whole world. You are my witnesses to the ends of the earth.