

Homily

Feast of the Ascension - C

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
May 30, 2019

Acts 1: 1-11
Ps 47: 2-3, 6-7, 8-9
Eph 1: 17-23 or Heb 9: 24-28; 10: 19-23
Lk 24: 46-53

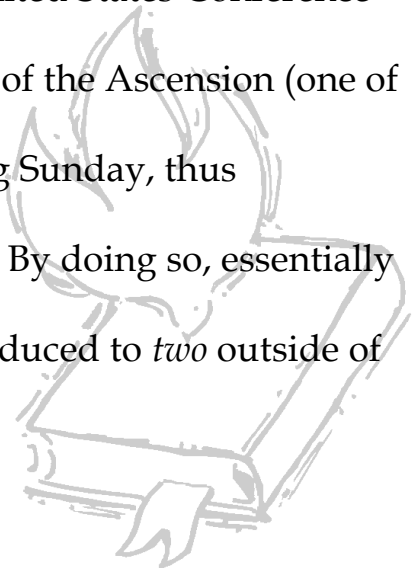
This homily was offered on Ascension Thursday, whose celebration was moved to the Seventh Sunday of Easter in 2002.

Code of Canon Law - Canon 1246 (Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation)

β1: Sunday is the day on which the paschal mystery is celebrated in light of the apostolic tradition and is to be observed as the foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church. Also to be observed are the day of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Epiphany, the Ascension and the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, Holy Mary Mother of God and her Immaculate Conception and Assumption, Saint Joseph, the Apostles Saints Peter and Paul, and finally, All Saints.

β2: However, the conference of bishops can abolish certain holy days of obligation or transfer them to a Sunday with prior approval of the Apostolic See.

So you good sisters know that in 2002, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops chose to *move* the Solemnity of the Ascension (one of the *ten* Holy Days of Obligation) to the following Sunday, thus removing it from a Thursday Day of Obligation. By doing so, essentially the *ten* days of obligation in the US have been reduced to *two* outside of



Sundays (Christmas and the Immaculate Conception being the two, unless the Immaculate Conception falls on a Sunday, then which it is moved to a Monday and is still a day of obligation). When All Saints' Day, the Assumption or Solemnity of Mary falls on a Saturday or a Monday, the day is still celebrated but is no longer considered a day of obligation. *Did you get your scorecards corrected with all these changes???*

The problem that we encounter by moving Ascension Thursday to a Sunday is that we lose the symbolism behind this particular celebration, specifically the importance of the number *forty*. According to scripture scholars, the number forty is utilized over one hundred fifty times in the bible, from the number of years that the Chosen People journeyed through the wilderness in the Book of Exodus and Numbers to the days Elijah went without food up the mountain of Horeb or Jonah spent in the belly of a big fish out of his fear for ministry. Our Lord spent forty days in the desert being tempted by the devil after his ministry, as depicted in three of our four gospels as well!

Liturgically, we celebrate the number forty in many ways as well. The Christmas Season runs forty days, up to the celebration of

Candlemas, the Presentation of the Lord (February 2nd). The Lenten Season runs forty days, parallel to the Lord's temptation in the desert. Forty days after Easter, the Lord ascends into heaven, preparing the disciples for their own specific ministry before he leaves them on the earth in the flesh.

The author of both the gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles references this story of Jesus' ascension *twice*, once at the end of the gospel and once at the beginning of Acts. He does this because the story of the ascension frames the two types of ministries he emphasizes in these texts. In the gospel passage, the author of Luke depicts a kind of "history" in relation to the life of Jesus Christ, his ministry and certainly his message. At the end of this gospel, the Lukan Jesus summarizes his ministry and expectations for the apostles who continue his work, then ascends to heaven, leaving his mission to those that follow.

In Acts, the story begins with Jesus