

FEAST OF THE ASCENSION “A” 2020

If there was any word that would describe these past eight weeks of isolation, it would be the word LOSS. All of us have experienced a loss of some kind. Certainly, all of us have lost a sense of normalcy. I don't know about you but everything has been turned topsy-turvy. Even my sleep patterns are off. The last few nights I dream that I can't find the Roman Missal or the Second Eucharistic Prayer or even my vestments. Some have suffered a loss of security—perhaps a loss of a job and the economic insecurity it has caused, or, even worse, the loss of a loved one during this pandemic and you can't celebrate a funeral Mass.

Many others may have experienced other losses this past year—perhaps a close friend has moved away or a trusted co-worker took a job at another company or your mother or father or a child, or sibling or some other relative has fallen ill.

Since we all suffer losses like these throughout our lives, how do we deal with those losses? What do we do to cope? On this Feast Day of the Ascension, I would like to share with you a few lessons—courtesy of the 12 Apostles—who can teach us how to deal with losses in our lives.

The Apostles can teach us because they suffered a terrible loss in their lives on that first Ascension Day. They lost Jesus as they knew Him! After living with these men for 3 years, and then appearing to them for 40 days after his Resurrection, our Lord Jesus ascended into heaven, never to be with the Apostles in exactly the same way again.

To their credit, the Apostles handled this loss much better than they had handled the loss of Jesus on Good Friday. Back then, they ran away and did everything wrong. This time, they did almost everything right. And what did they do?

First of all, Scripture says that the *Apostles prayed*. They dealt with their loss through prayer. And this wasn't just casual, half-hearted prayer that they engaged in. Scripture says, "*They devoted themselves to constant prayer.*" To be perfectly frank, they probably prayed harder than they had ever prayed in their lives! That's the first lesson we need to learn when we encounter loss in our lives—devote yourselves to prayer.

Second, the Apostles engaged in this prayerful support *together*. That's also significant! The Scriptures say that, after Jesus ascended, the Apostles went to the Upper Room *as a group*. Back on Holy Thursday, after Jesus was arrested, the Apostles had scattered. Now they gathered together and prayerfully supported one another.

Whenever we suffer a loss in our lives, we should always turn to prayer, believing that God's grace can help us deal with our pain. Also we should reach out and get connected to others—our family members and good friends—especially good believing Christian and Catholic friends who will give us the human and spiritual support we need.

Of course, if we want an even greater measure of help, we should look beyond the friends we have on this earth and look to the "*friends*" we have in heaven—*especially our*

Blessed Mother. This is something we also learn from the Apostles. The Bible tells us explicitly that Mary was with the Apostles in the Upper Room after the Ascension and until Pentecost. In almost every painting or image of the moment of Pentecost, you will see Mary at the center of the Apostles as the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles 10 days after the Ascension. You could say that those 12 men dealt with their loss with the help of Mary.

I don't know if many of you know this, but Karol Wojtyla—who later would become Pope John Paul II and then Pope St. John Paul II—he lost his entire family—his mother, his father, his sister and his brother—before he was 21 years of age. In the midst of those losses, he developed a deep love and a very strong devotion to our Blessed Mother—so much so that, when he became Pope, he took as his motto, “*Totus Tuus*”—which means “*I'm totally yours, Mary—I'm totally consecrated to Jesus through you.*”

Like Peter and the Apostles, Karol Wojtyla dealt with his losses by seeking support and comfort from the Blessed Mother. That is a very good reason for us to do the same.

Next, the Apostles turned to the *Holy Eucharist* during this difficult time of loss. After Pentecost, the Bible says that the early Christians devoted themselves to “*the breaking of bread.*” The “*breaking of bread,*” of course, was the Holy Eucharist. If that was the case after Pentecost, I think it's pretty reasonable to infer that the Apostles also celebrated this Sacrament *before* Pentecost when they were with Mary and the others in the Upper Room.

I know many people who started going to daily Mass at some point in the past *after* someone close to them died or after they suffered a terrible loss. And they have continued that practice to the present day because they have found strength and comfort in the Blessed Sacrament, just as the Apostles did after the Ascension.

And finally, the Apostles *persevered*. So the Apostles prayed, they supported each other, they looked to Mary, they celebrated the Eucharist, and, finally they persevered in doing these things for 10 days until the promise of Jesus was finally fulfilled and the Holy Spirit descended on them. Jesus had told them it would happen “*within a few days.*” They probably interpreted “*within a few days*” to mean “*1 or 2,*” but they didn’t give up even after a week had passed. They persevered.

The bottom line, my brothers and sisters, is this: the Apostles could not stop Jesus from ascending into heaven; they could not prevent that “*loss.*” Most of the time, we can’t control the losses in our lives: loved ones die, neighbors move, friends change jobs, sicknesses come—case in point, this current pandemic and the chaos it has caused—and we are powerless to stop any of it from happening. But what we can control is our *response* to the losses we experience, just as the Apostles controlled their response to the loss of Jesus.

That’s why on this Feast of the Ascension, it would do us well to learn and live the lessons the Apostles taught us at the moment of the Ascension about how to deal with losses in our lives: 1) They prayed; 2) They supported each other emotionally and

spiritually; 3) They looked to Mary and her intercession; 4) They celebrated the Eucharist; and 5) they persevered with all these things until the promise of Jesus was finally fulfilled and the Holy Spirit descended on them.

If we do these things, then the Holy Spirit also will come to us and not only will get us through the losses, but will use those losses for great blessings in our lives.