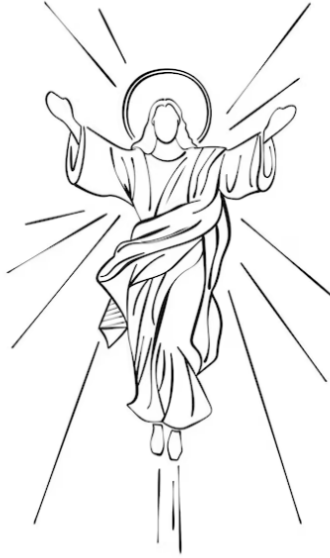


**A Sermon for The Seventh Sunday after Easter
The Ascension
June 1, 2025**



The Ascension

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[Ascension Day](#)

How wonderful to be with you again! You were much on my mind as I galumphed around Germany and Italy. I missed you, but I knew you could run this church on your own.

We are celebrating Ascension today, which is sort of about travel, as Jesus leaves his disciples after 40 days of resurrection appearances and departs for heaven. He leaves his followers to carry on, bringing the Good News to the world.

We had a feast day on the liturgical calendar yesterday which has nothing to do with Ascension but a lot to do with travel. It is the Feast of the Visitation. Mary has just heard from the Archangel Gabriel that she would bear God's son. I imagine that she was very startled by this announcement, which included news about her cousin Elizabeth, who was also pregnant in unlikely circumstances. Elizabeth had assumed that she was barren, but God had set all kinds of things in motion six months before and Elizabeth was now in her sixth month. Mary went to visit Elizabeth, to seek the older woman's wisdom. Mary arrived and immediately Elizabeth knew what was going on, greeting Mary with "Hail, Mary, full of grace! Blessed be the fruit of your womb!" And Mary, freed by Elizabeth's understanding, sang forth with joy the beautiful canticle we know as the Magnificat. It was indeed a joyful and significant journey. Mary stayed about three months, until Elizabeth delivered her son John.

I have had my own visitation this past month, a time filled with much joy and discovery. As I wrote to you in my final Dispatch from Rome, I rejoiced in relationships the whole time. I also turned 80 years old, and often my adventures reminded me of the challenges of my years.

When Jesus left his disciples, the angels standing around told the disciples to stop staring dumbly up in the air, but rather look around themselves on the earth and get busy. Times were changing and the disciples were to be the vanguard, no longer followers, but leaders. From that little nucleus of eleven apostles, great things developed. The world changed, and it is still changing.

Being in Rome is a constant reminder of the passage of eras, from Ancient Rome through the Middle Ages, through the changes of the medieval church, to the election of a new pope, Leo XIV, an American even!

We are in a challenging time in our own country, and it is being noticed by Europeans. Everywhere I went, people wanted to talk about America's current challenges. My host in Rome is a former Harvard professor, and of course each day the news brought more episodes of the university's challenges. The world is changing and this too is a journey into the unknown.

Liturgically, we will celebrate Pentecost next week, when the Holy Spirit came and enlivened everyone, enabling everyone to understand each other in a great mixture of languages. We will celebrate this multilingual event next week by praying the Lord's Prayer in an assortment of languages, simultaneously. It will create quite a buzz!

And we will pray for understanding among peoples and nations, spreading the Good News that God loves all of us. We have lots of work to do.