



*Homily – Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord 2011 (A)
w. Celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation for Adultsⁱ*

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*Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angeles
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My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, and especially you, my brothers and sisters who today will receive the fullness of initiation into the Catholic Church in the Sacrament of Confirmation:

It is providential that we celebrate your confirmation today as we celebrate this beautiful solemnity of the Ascension of our Lord. Next Sunday, we will celebrate Pentecost Sunday and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles.

The days between the Ascension and Pentecost, I imagine were very interesting for the apostles. I'm sure they had mixed feelings. because Jesus was not there with them physically but they knew he promised to send them the Holy Spirit. So I guess they were days of uncertainty for them and at the same time days of expectation and hope.

And as I was trying to reflect on today's celebration and the fact that we are coming to the end of the Easter season, as I was reading the readings for today's Mass, it caught my attention that the Easter season began with *angels*. The angels are there at the empty tomb of Jesus. And they have a message for the disciples. They say: "Why do you seek the living among the dead? *He is not here, but has risen!*"ⁱⁱ

In today's solemnity, the Ascension of the Lord at the end of the Easter season, again the angels are present. And, as you can imagine, this has special meaning because this is the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels. So the angels are here, somehow. The angels are always present among us because each one of us has a guardian angel. The angels are especially present at the celebration of the Eucharist.

And as we just heard in today's first reading, the angels also have a message for the disciples: "*Why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus ... will come in the same way as you have seen him go into heaven.*"

The story of Easter and the story of our discipleship are told in these two messages from the angels. In the Easter season we move from the *empty tomb* to the *empty sky*.

We cannot "see" Jesus anymore, physically. His tomb is empty, the sky is empty. He has risen from dead. And now he has ascended into heaven.

Yet in the Gospel this morning we hear his beautiful promise: “*Behold, I am with you always, until the close of the age.*”

So what the angels and our Lord are telling us today is that he is coming again. That there will be an end to this age.

But no matter what people say, we cannot know the day or the hour. Not even the angels or the Son of Man know — only the Father knows. Jesus himself told us that.ⁱⁱⁱ

So what matters is not the empty sky and *when* our Lord will return. What matters is what we do with our lives until he does return.

That is why it is providential that we are celebrating your confirmation on this beautiful day. Because your confirmation is about a new birth, a new beginning, a new life that God is giving you through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is important for all of us too. Because we are always beginning and beginning again in our Christian lives, in our spiritual lives.

And it is especially beautiful because today we have just heard Jesus’ last words to his apostles. They are words of *commissioning*, “Go and preach the Gospel.” With the Ascension, Christ’s earthly mission comes to a close and our mission as his disciples begins.

Jesus promises in today’s Gospel that he will send his Spirit upon his disciples so that they will be his witnesses, to the ends of the earth.

The Church received the Spirit on Pentecost, which we will celebrate next Sunday.

And each one of us has been given the gifts of the Holy Spirit in our Baptism. These gifts are increased in us and confirmed sacramentally in Confirmation. And in Confirmation we are also given a special strength of the Holy Spirit — so that we can be true witnesses to Christ in word and action.^{iv}

So, as you can see, these readings in this Mass are especially meaningful to you who are about to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. These readings are also meaningful for all of us. Because our Lord’s words parting words today are addressed to each one of us.

We are called to make disciples of all nations. We are called to teach all men and women to live by what Jesus commanded. And we are called to baptize in the name of the Father, and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

In other words, we are all called to be missionaries. What happened on Pentecost Day? The apostles went out, and St. Peter started preaching the Gospel. And thousands of people became Catholic. And here we are — in Los Angeles, California — as a consequence of that moment when the apostles received the Holy Spirit.

So each one of you, and all of us are called to be missionaries. That doesn't mean that we have to go to a foreign country. We have to be missionaries in the ordinary circumstances of our lives. In our homes and neighborhoods, in the places where we work.

That's our mission, that's our call. Especially you who are about to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. You are called by the apostles to be witnesses of the resurrection. And you are called to go out and preach the Gospel to the people of our time.

So as we pray for our candidates for Confirmation, let us also renew our devotion to the Holy Spirit and our commitment to the mission that Jesus Christ has given us as his disciples.

There is a beautiful, old tradition in the Catholic Church, that this holy ten days of preparation for the Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit, is a good time to try to intensify our devotion to the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is always teaching us. He is always present to us. But we need to listen to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

So let us go forward in faith, confident that our Lord Jesus Christ goes with us on our journey. Let us never forget the beautiful truth that our Lord is with us until the close of the age. He is in heaven but at the same time he comes to us in the Eucharist and in the Sacred Scriptures.

I insist, the Holy Spirit, the sanctifier, is always present to us and working with us in our souls. So let us ask for the grace to listen carefully to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

And let us ask Our Lady of the Angels to seek the grace for us to live from the message of the holy angels — as we go forward in faith to be his witnesses, serving our brothers and sisters in love, waiting in joyful hope until he comes again in glory.

ⁱ Readings: Acts 1:1–11; Ps. 47:2–3, 6–9; Eph. 1:17–23; Matt. 28:16–20.

ⁱⁱ Luke 24:5.

ⁱⁱⁱ Matt. 24:36.

^{iv} *Catechism*, 1303, 2044.