

FATHER MARK SCHULTE HOMILY
The Ascension of Our Lord (B)
May 16, 2021
“Teaching from the Garden”

Today, the Church celebrates the Ascension of Our Lord, Jesus Christ into heaven. The Feast of the Ascension marks the end of a forty-day period of time from the event of His resurrection on Easter Sunday until He ascended body and soul on a cloud up into the heavenly regions (Mk 16:15-20).

The Acts of the Apostles mentions, specifically, that Jesus met with His Apostles at various times and places teaching them about the Kingdom, over a period of forty days (Acts 1:1-11).

God often used a period of forty days as a preparation time in the salvation history of His people. The great flood in the time of Noah lasted forty days (Gen 7:17). The Israelite people journey for forty years in the wilderness before entering the promised land (Ps 95:10). Moses spent forty days on Mt. Sinai preparing to receive God’s revelation of the covenant of the Ten Commandments (Ex 24:18). The prophet Elijah would walk for forty days and forty nights to reach his destination, after being strengthened by the bread that God provided for him (1 Kg 19:8). Our Lord fasted in the desert forty days in preparation for His public life (Mt 4:2). Soon after His ascension, the Lord will send his Holy Spirit upon the Church at Pentecost.

Today, is also the memorial of St. Isidore (L.H. Vol III, p 1998). St. Isidore was a farm laborer in Spain. He is the patron saint of farmers and rural communities. This is of particular significance in our area for we are farming communities, for the most part, and we live in rural communities, more or less.

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus directed His Apostles to preach and teach the Gospel way of life. For the Apostles, the Church will become the Garden or Farm which they must tend. Israel was referred to as God’s vineyard (Isa 27:3-5). A vineyard is a kind of garden in its own way. The Church is the New Israel – the new vineyard of God (CCC 877). The people of God were also referred to as wheat from the farm that would be harvested and gathered into God’s barn (Mt 13:24-30). This responsibility to tend the Garden of God’s people extends beyond the Apostles to the Church as a whole and into families which are the domestic church (CCC 1655-56). Families are the micro gardens of God’s life in the world and each of these family gardens have their own gardener or caretaker. It is the Father of these family gardens.

In the beginning, Adam was given by God the responsibility to tend His garden (Gen 2:15). We call it the Garden of Eden. In Adam’s garden, there were Eve his wife and the rest of his family. Adam was given by God specific instructions on how to tend the garden. Later on, God would give other men their own family gardens to tend. We can think of Abraham and other patriarchs.

Even Jesus, after His resurrection, was thought by Mary Magdelene to be the gardener in the place that she saw Him (Jn 20:11-18). Jesus is the New Adam and Jesus as gardener can be a reference to the first Adam who was a gardener (1 Cor 15:45-49). It would only be after Jesus called her name “Mary” that she would recognize Him as Jesus.

This morning I asked the men in the men’s prayer group, all of which are married men, who tend their own family gardens like Adam, to tell me what they believe is necessary to raise a good family. There is over 200 years of married family life experience between these men. All together they gave me about 20 principles that they thought were essential to raising a family. Of the 20 principles, about six of them begin with the word “teach”, that is to say about 1/3 of the principles begin with the word teach. That is a significant number, and I did not coach their responses in any way. This should not be surprising to us because scripture gives to the father a principal responsibility to teach, especially his children in the ways of faith (Ps 103:13). This is exactly what Jesus commanded his Apostles to do before he ascended into heaven, He said “Go and teach all nations”.

Jesus is referred to as the new Adam because unlike the first Adam Jesus will fulfill God the Father’s will. As fathers of families, in the spirit of St. Isidore patron saint of farmers, and Jesus the gardener that Mary Magdelene recognized, these fathers are now the “New Adams” of their own family gardens. They nurture their family gardens by teaching them the ways of faith.

The scripture passage tells us that after Jesus ascended into heaven He would return again someday. The family is the garden of life in which souls live in and are nurtured until our Lord returns again.

Father’s Day is a few weeks away yet, but fathers, you can consider this your Father’s Day message. Go and be good caretakers of God’s garden, your family. You will be required to give an accounting of it one day.

You can find the other family life principles that the men’s prayer group mentioned in the gathering space of the church. I think that they are quite profound. You can see that when these men gather, they do more than just drink coffee and eat doughnuts!

I offer my encouragement to those fathers who are making every effort to raise godly families. For those fathers who feel they have been lacking in their fatherly care in some way:

- Remember, God is merciful,
- repent of your failures, and
- you can start fresh again today.

Addendum: The men's list of recommendations for raising a good family.

- God is #1.
- Teach children the virtues before age 5.
- Obey father and mother.
- Show love to God and family.
- Consistency in making rules and discipline.
- Give guidance and advice in their decisions.
- Teach your children to attend Mass.
- Husband and wife show cooperation in raising children.
- Set a spiritual example.
- Be willing to sacrifice for your family.
- Do things as a family.
- Teach family traditions.
- Marriage is for life.
- Keep your commitments (promises).
- Teach good moral principles (no contraception).
- Have wife stay at home with the children.
- Teach respect for others.
- Pray the family Rosary.
- Teach good work ethics (chores).
- Strengthen relationship with wife.

(These are not necessarily in order of priority.) They are not meant to say everything there is to know about raising a family. They are written in the form that they were given without any editing.