

# REFLECTION FROM . . .



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## ASCENSION

In a little over a week we will celebrate the feast day of the Ascension of our Lord into Heaven on May 24th. As I reflect on this wonderful feast day, I am reminded of what we talked about in my Paschal Mystery class this year about the Ascension. One of my favorite parts of teaching is being able to pose interesting *what if* questions to my students. In this case the question was: how different would the Catholic Church and the whole world be if Christ did not ascend into Heaven but remained on Earth after his Resurrection? As Catholics we recognize Christ as not just our Lord and Savior but ultimately God incarnate. As God with us the Lord would be able to heal all diseases and remove all suffering in the world. I received a lot of interesting responses from my students about the idea of the risen Christ being with us to this day, but the ultimate goal of asking that question was to help my students see how the Ascension was for our benefit rather than a mystery that deprived us of our Lord's presence. If Christ remained on Earth after his Resurrection people would have to travel from all over the world to encounter our Lord. On top of the world travel there would be the even bigger challenge of managing the billions of people who would want to be with the Lord face to face. My favorite image of that scenario is having to take a ticket with a number in the billions as you wait in line to see Christ. On a more serious note, families would do everything in their power to bring their sick family members to encounter the healing power of our Lord. If Christ was still with us in his Resurrected body, we would all be asking him to heal the world of this pandemic.

By ascending into Heaven, Christ made himself even more available to us not less available. Instead of having to fly to Jerusalem and wait a lifetime to see the Lord, we have the awesome opportunity to be with the Lord whenever we visit any Catholic Church in the world. The Lord's Eucharistic presence allows billions of people to encounter the love and presence of our savior at the same time. Part of the unique hardship of this pandemic has been the necessity to temporarily close our Churches which limits our ability to visit the Lord in the tabernacles in our parishes. This separation should increase our hunger for the Most Blessed Sacrament so that when our Churches reopen, we will all be more faithful to our faith and our Lord. Before the pandemic only 25% of self-identified Catholics attend Sunday Mass every week. Hopefully after this pandemic that number will increase as we recognize our need for community, worship, and the grace that comes to us only through the Sacraments. A common question I receive is why does God not take away all disease and suffering from the world? Part of the answer to that question comes to us through the feast of the Ascension in that we learn that Christ ascended so that he could prepare our place in Heaven for each of us. "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be." (John 14: 2-3). Our ultimate goal and destination is eternal life in Heaven with God and all the Angels and Saints. Our desire for a world without pain and suffering will be fulfilled when we take our place in our Heavenly homeland.