

THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

May 17, 2026

Quote:

When they had gathered together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He answered them, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight. While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven." Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. ~Acts 6:1-12

Reflection: The Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord commemorates the fortieth day after the Resurrection when Jesus ascended body and soul into Heaven and took His seat at the right hand of His Father. Traditionally, the location of the Ascension is believed to be less than a mile east of the Old City of Jerusalem, and that spot is marked by the Chapel of the Ascension, which is said to contain a miraculous imprint of the footprints of Christ before He ascended. The event of the Ascension is found in the Gospels and Acts ([Mark 16:19-20](#); [Luke 24:50-53](#); [Acts 1:6-12](#)). It is also alluded to in various other passages ([John 6:62](#); [Ephesians 4:7-10](#); [1 Timothy 3:16](#); [1 Peter 3:21-22](#)).

Only Jesus and His Blessed Mother have entered into the glories of Heaven, body and soul. Jesus' Ascension implies that He did so by His own authority and power. The Blessed Virgin Mary's Assumption implies that she entered Heaven, body and soul, by God's power, and not her own.

The Ascension marks the completion of Jesus' earthly mission. He first united His divine nature with human nature through the Incarnation at the moment of the Annunciation. Saint Thomas Aquinas teaches that from that moment on, Jesus, the Son of God, experienced three types of knowledge. First, being God, He had beatific knowledge, that is, a direct knowledge of His essence, the Father's essence, and the Holy Spirit's essence. Second, He had the perfection of infused knowledge, that is, a bestowal of all truths given to the angels in Heaven, especially those truths necessary for the completion of His divine mission. Third, He began to acquire learned knowledge, or experiential knowledge. This was the form of knowledge attained through His human nature from the senses and His human reason.

As Jesus fulfilled His mission throughout His life, His knowledge continued to grow until it was perfected in human form. It was never imperfect in the sense of sin, but only in the sense of growth through human experience and human love. He experienced all things, allowed the perfection of His beatific and infused knowledge to guide His human experiences, and brought those human experiences and knowledge to perfection. His free embrace of the Cross manifested the perfection of divine love in human form, and His Resurrection brought that perfect unity of human and divine love to a new and transformed resurrected state of human existence. But that was not all. Today we commemorate the fact that Jesus took His perfected human nature into the Beatific Vision, enabling humanity itself to follow. The Blessed Virgin Mary was the first to do so, given her sinless state.

The final stage of the salvation of humanity will take place when Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead. At that time, every human body will rise, will endure the final purification and transformation, and will share in the new and resurrected state in which the faithful will be able to stand, body and soul, before the Most Holy Trinity and experience the fullness of the Beatific Vision forever. What Jesus has already accomplished in His human form is what we look forward to in hope at the end of time.

The Feast of the Ascension was celebrated annually from as early as apostolic times. Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, and Saint Augustine all attest to this fact. When the Council of Nicaea set the date for the celebration of the Resurrection in 325, it chose to keep Easter on the first Sunday after the first full moon occurring on or after the vernal equinox in spring. This decision also set the day for the Ascension as forty days after Easter, on a Thursday. Today, many ecclesiastical provinces transfer the Thursday celebration to the following Sunday to provide for a wider celebration.

Though every aspect of Christ's life is shrouded in mysteries which will only be fully understood by the faithful when they stand before Him and behold the Beatific Vision, today we especially ponder this beautiful and profound mystery of our faith. As we celebrate the Ascension, try to prayerfully meditate upon the perfect unity of Jesus' human and divine natures. Ponder further the truth that because the Son of God is both God and man, and He beholds His Father and the Holy Spirit as both God and man, He invites each of us to begin to share in that glorious vision. Only after we fully die in and with Him and rise to new life in and with Him will we be able to know Him clearly and share in His glorious resurrected and ascended life. Until that moment comes, it's important to ponder that which is incomprehensible. We must know that we do not know, believe what is beyond belief, and hope in that which is more than we can understand. God is a mystery; the Ascension is a mystery—but they are mysteries that must be penetrated by prayer. Do so today as we commemorate this holy culmination of the earthly life and mission of Christ.

Prayer: *My Ascended Lord, forty days after You rose from the dead, You ascended to the right hand of the Father in Heaven, taking up Your throne from which You pour forth both judgment and mercy. As we honor this great mystery of Your divine and human life, I beg for mercy upon me and upon the whole world. Free us from all sin, and open the floodgates of Your mercy so that all people will share one day, body and soul, in the glory of Your Beatific Vision. Jesus, I trust in You. AMEN*

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Living a Catholic Life

Infertility and the Embryo

“Living a Catholic Life” is a publication of The National Catholic Bioethics Center that educates the faithful on the pressing moral issues of the day through discussion of relevant Church teachings and the application of Catholic principles of bioethics.

Babies are an incredible blessing and gift from God. The Church in her wisdom has provided an excellent guide regarding medical interventions aimed at overcoming infertility in a teaching document, *Dignitas Personae*. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith explains that any procedure that replaces the conjugal act in order to overcome infertility is not morally acceptable. “The Church . . . holds that it is ethically unacceptable to dissociate procreation from the integrally personal context of the conjugal act: human procreation is a personal act of a husband and wife, which is not capable of substitution.” Interventions that serve to assist the conjugal act or to increase fertility can be morally good depending on further ethical criteria. Catholics look at infertility care using this lens: which therapies and techniques respect the marital act and the rights and dignity of the parents and child, and which do not?

Human freedom has limits, and a basic one is that there is no “right to a child.” The bride and groom must be open to life for a valid marriage in the Church, but there is no guarantee of children. My wife and I experienced the trial of over eight childless years of marriage before we conceived our daughter, Therese. We explored ethical infertility treatments and had many people praying for us. My wife Marie wrote an insightful book from a Catholic perspective, *When Expecting Doesn't Happen*, that discusses the suffering of infertility, spiritual support for couples and their families, the treatments that are available, and even the reactions of friends or others to infertility.

A key insight of Pope Saint John Paul II was that human persons are procreated as a gift from God, and we are made with a deep longing to give ourselves completely. This explains the radicalness of sacramental marriages where husband and wife vow to make a complete gift of themselves to their spouses for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, etc., until death. Since a child is a gift rather than a right, it follows that we must respect the ethical conditions for a proper reception of these little ones and never treat them like commodities or objects to be created artificially or discarded at will.

The secular approach to infertility generally involves in vitro fertilization (IVF). This technique completely replaces the sexual act of the parents by first procuring human egg and sperm cells and then having third parties conceive new human lives in laboratory glassware (hence, in vitro). IVF denies the right of children to be conceived by a loving act of their parents and to have their human dignity respected. Obtaining the many human eggs

needed in the process is painful and sometimes dangerous. The documentary “Eggsplotation” gives examples of abuses by the fertility industry that take place in procuring eggs from young women. For the men, the usual procedure for procuring sperm is the immoral means of masturbation. After embryos are conceived in the lab, they are frequently subjected to pre-implantation genetic diagnosis for quality control purposes. Those who fail these tests are treated as “defective products” to be thrown away. Others are put into frozen storage in liquid nitrogen tanks. This suspended animation can last for years, unjustly imprisoning these tiny humans. Numerous embryos are abandoned by their biological parents. Some embryos are transferred to a womb, but not necessarily their mother’s. Many fail to implant. Some do but miscarry later in the pregnancy. The whole IVF process is so lethal that only 10% of the embryos originally conceived typically survive to birth.

IVF also creates the problem of helpless human embryos in laboratories exposed to experimentation or dismemberment for their stem cells. Three human embryos in a Chinese lab were subjected to germ-line gene editing by a scientist who altered the DNA of the little girls he had chosen so that their cells have a genetic modification that will be passed on to any future children and on down their hereditary line. Many abuses are possible because of the conception of children in labs and their manipulation by scientists.

Fortunately, there is a better world of infertility care greatly influenced by a Catholic ethical perspective, Restorative Reproductive Medicine. It is defined as a scientific approach to reproductive medicine seeking to cooperate with or restore the normal physiology and anatomy of the human reproductive system without the use of methods that are inherently suppressive, circumventive, or destructive to natural human functions. Simple education in natural methods of fertility awareness can help many couples suffering from infertility conceive and bear children. The Saint Paul VI Institute, since 1985, has treated infertility with success rates higher than those of IVF users. For spiritual support there are Catholic infertility ministries like Springs in the Desert.

The pain of infertility can be tremendous, but ethical medical care and compassionate spiritual support are the best solutions. The ethical violations inherent in technological baby-making are too high a price to pay for the joy of parenthood. Our children must be respected starting from the way they come into existence and throughout the rest of their lives.

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