

- With today's celebration of our Lord's ascension into Heaven, we come to the final piece of the mystery of our redemption, which we call the Paschal Mystery.
- Since Holy Thursday night, the Church has immersed Herself in Christ's Paschal Mystery, beginning with His suffering and death on the cross, and then His resurrection on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, and now – finally – our Lord's ascension into Heaven.
- Through these sacred mysteries, Jesus has redeemed us and made salvation possible. He has opened up for us the way to Heaven.
- In the mystery of the Ascension, we witness our Lord passing through the veil separating heaven and earth. He does this not to obscure Himself from us, not to abandon us, but to lead us deeper into the mysteries of our faith.
- In His Ascension Jesus gives us a foretaste of what awaits us who believe in Him. The Ascension is a foreshadowing of that divine life to which we are all called and for which we were all made.
- As our Lord ascends into Heaven, we are called into a period of prayer – just as were Our Lady and the Apostles, who spent 9 days in the Upper Room, awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost!
- Those 9 days between our Lord's Ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost framed the Church's first novena, and this period of time remains a privileged time of prayer in the Church. And pray we must, for our world is in desperate need!
- Very beautifully, in the ascension of our Lord's body into Heaven, not only is our Lord's Paschal Mystery completed, but we are taught something about the magnificent dignity of our human nature.
- Our understanding of our human dignity begins with the mystery of the Incarnation, when we celebrate that God was willing to clothe Himself in our human flesh, becoming like us in all things but sin.
- But now in the Ascension, we recall how – 40 days after the Resurrection – our human nature was raised, as Pope St. Leo the Great says, "above the dignity of the whole heavenly creation, above the ranks of angels, above the exalted status of archangels."
- In other words, man was created by God for greatness in that man was created to be in eternal union with God! This is the magnificence of human nature: that God desires man to be glorified with Him!
- One of the great tragedies of our post-modern, post-Christian Western society is that so many people do not understand this greatness for which man has been created. Because of this, human life is so very often undervalued or taken for granted.
- Abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, embryonic stem cell research, artificial means of fertilization, the manipulation and degradation of the nuptial act, not to mention the widespread violence of our society, are all proof that the post-modern man doesn't understand the value and dignity of human life.
- Moreover, not only does the post-modern man not understand the value and dignity of our human nature, but he also misunderstands the type of greatness to which man is called!
- The typical mindset in our world today is that man's greatness is found in his autonomy and power: being able to shape and control his environment and ultimately determine his destiny – making himself the measure of all things.

- Yet this is not our Christian belief. As Christians we know that man's greatness is found not in self-exaltation or human achievement, but rather in dying to self so that Christ might live within us!
- Our dignity is found not in seeking to live independently of God, as so many in our world try to do today, but rather in humbling ourselves under God's mighty hand, trusting in faith that God's will is the best thing that can ever happen to us.
- The more we die to self and seek the Lord's will over our own, the more human we become!
- A couple of Sundays ago, I mentioned that Planned Parenthood is soon to open a new abortion mill in Charlotte – and not terribly far from here. I bring this up again because the abortion industry is a great threat to man's dignity!
- Planned Parenthood – and all abortionists – propound the insidious lie that man should be completely free to act as he wishes and desires, even to the point of taking the life of an innocent unborn child so that one may live as one wishes.
- Planned Parenthood targets women when they're most vulnerable, preying upon humanity's innate sense of justice with their false language that speaks of "protecting" a woman's "right to choose" and to have control of her own body.
- They clamor for what they call "reproductive rights," all the while denying the more fundamental right to life to the unborn children they ruthlessly slaughter.
- They speak of freedom, and yet when they've completed their dirty work in a woman's womb, that woman may be free of an unwanted pregnancy, but she is now shackled in the shame and guilt that is abortion's aftermath.
- I can tell you as a priest who has heard dozens and dozens of confessions involving abortion that there is nothing good, nothing liberating that comes from it.
- Innocent children are killed before they're even born, and the women who suffer abortion are left emotionally and spiritually wrecked and wounded – sometimes for life.
- And so abortion is an evil that must be fought in our society today. While there are many hopeful signs in the restrictive abortion laws currently being passed by various states, there are plenty of other states legalizing even greater access to this evil.
- As for us here in Charlotte, we cannot be quiet about Planned Parenthood's new abortion mill. Our city is already an abortion destination, and Planned Parenthood obviously wants to make it even more so.
- So as we come into this privileged period of prayer in the time between our Lord's Ascension and the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost, I ask you to pray an extra Rosary each day for the intention that this new abortion mill will not open or stay open for long.
- This is not simply about saving the lives of unborn children and protecting women from the horrors of abortion, but also about safeguarding our magnificent human dignity that Christ saw fit to raise above the dignity of the angels.
- In His Ascension, Jesus reveals to us the ultimate destiny of our human nature: to be united and glorified with God in the eternity of Heaven. May we all work to safeguard that dignity from the evil forces in our society that seek to degrade it.