

- Every year on the Solemnity of the Annunciation, we recall the moment when the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Our Lady, announcing God’s desire that she become the Virgin Mother of our Lord.
- It was one of the most dramatic events in all of salvation history. Imagine: the salvation for all of humanity depending on the free consent of a teenaged virgin! That’s what was at stake as St. Gabriel approached Our Lady in Nazareth so long ago.
- Yet, Our Lady, with grace and humility both sublime and gentle, chose for God’s will to be done, and we are the beneficiaries.
- At Our Lady’s word, God stepped out of eternity into the limits of time and space and became man. We call this mystery the Incarnation, which literally means to take on flesh.
- Why is the Incarnation so important? Because Jesus’ becoming man made it possible for Him to suffer, die, and rise again. In other words, the Incarnation makes the Paschal Mystery possible.
- And without the Paschal Mystery, there would be no forgiveness of sin, and thus no salvation for any of us. It was through our Lord’s humanity that the fount of God’s mercy was opened for us.
- Furthermore, through the Incarnation, divinity was united to humanity, thereby greatly ennobling humanity – which had forfeited its original dignity through original sin.
- Because of the utter importance of our Lord’s Incarnation, every Sunday when we pray together the *Creed*, we are called to bow profoundly at the words: “and by the Holy Spirit, [He] was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man.”
- Yet, this great mystery of the Incarnation, which is the mystery of our Lord’s eternal divinity stepping into the confines of time and space in order to be clothed in our humanity, finds its completion in today’s mystery of the Ascension.
- For in the mystery that we celebrate today, our humanity – subject to the limits of time and space – is taken up into the infinity of Heaven, there to be eternally joined to the Godhead.
- Thus, through the Ascension of our Lord, humanity has been lifted up on high into the heart of God, drawing us into even closer bonds with Him Who made us, Who saves us, and Who sustains us in being.
- Though God has never been aloof to man, through the Ascension our Lord dwells in Heaven as one of us, and mankind enjoys a dignity greater than Adam and Eve before their Fall.
- In the Ascension 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.”
- Truly, because of these mysteries: the Mystery of the Incarnation and the Mystery of our Lord’s Ascension, man has been given a remedy for his sinfulness so that he might enjoy a divine inheritance.
- Several of the Church Fathers enunciated this quite succinctly in the principle of divinization with the formula: God became man so that man might become God.
- You see, God has not only made us for Himself, but He has made us to *be* like Himself. And this thought should give us pause. None of us are mere mortals. Within all of us are the seeds of divinity.

- 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: to be clothed in His divinity, just as Jesus clothed Himself with our humanity!
- So, 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.
- 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, transgenderism, 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.
- Just today, there's an op-ed in the newspaper advocating that the best way to respect motherhood is to give women full access to abortion. On my part, I cannot think of anything more denigrating or more disrespectful to motherhood than abortion. The illogical hubris of this article is stupefying!
- 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.
- Some are so arrogant as to believe that man can even determine his own biological sex! And this belief is rooted in a pride by which man makes himself the measure of all things.
- Yet this is not our Christian belief. Man is not the measure of all things. Moreover, 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 holier and the more human we become!
- In conclusion, we know our Lord's Ascension inaugurated a period of prayer as Our Lady and the Apostles retreated for 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 each year.
- And pray we must, for humanity at large is in need of discovering itself, of understanding why God has created us, and learning where true greatness is to be found.
- As we look forward to the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, may we turn our eyes and our hearts to Heaven where our Lord goes before us today, and eagerly await the Spirit of Truth, Who will enlighten our minds, purify our hearts, and teach us how to attain that sublime dignity that God desires for each us.