



## ASCENSION

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU  
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault  
(Fontgombault, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024)

*Et eritis mihi testes.*

You shall be witnesses unto me.  
(*Acts 1:8*)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,  
My dearly beloved Sons,

**A**FTER ENCOUNTERING Christ risen and victorious over death during the first apparitions to the disciples, the Church invited us a few weeks ago to ponder on the figure of the Good Shepherd.<sup>a</sup> The Good Shepherd is He who leads His sheep so that “they may have life, and have it abundantly.”<sup>b</sup> He is for them the door:

a. Cf. *Jn 10*.

b. *Jn 10:10*.

If any one enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and go out, and find pasture.<sup>c</sup>

c. v. 9.

Unlike the hireling, the Good Shepherd gives his life for His sheep. He knows His own sheep and His own sheep know Him. As the parable of the lost sheep attests, He doesn't hesitate to leave the fold to go after the one which is lost.<sup>d</sup> The vocation of the Good Shepherd is expressed by the words he utters: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”<sup>e</sup>

d. *Lk 15:3-7*.

e. *Jn 14:6*.

On this Ascension morning, as we have just snuffed out the Paschal candle that symbolised the victory of light over darkness, and the presence of the glorious Christ among His own, shouldn't sorrow fill men's hearts, our own hearts? These forty

days during which Christ had presented Himself alive after His passion, giving many proofs of His resurrection, and speaking of the kingdom of God, had been such a joy for the disciples!

a. *Lk 24:52-53.* How then can we understand that according to St. Luke, these same disciples after the Lord had blessed them while He was carried up into heaven, “returned to Jerusalem with great joy, continually in the temple blessing God”<sup>a</sup>?

What a contrast with Good Friday evening, when Christ risen on a cross had seemed to forsake His disciples, who for that matter had already been scattered, or rather had Himself first been forsaken by them. Joy was missing.

b. *Lk 20:19.* Assuredly, today’s joy doesn’t stem from the liberation of the Master’s oppressive presence. No indeed, for the disciples fully know that His presence is a loving presence. Besides, they remember His first words on Easter morning, “*Pax vobis*, Peace be unto you.”<sup>b</sup> Maybe we should consider that this so unexpected joy stems from the mission the disciples have just received:

c. *Mk 16:15-16.* Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who refuses to believe will be condemned.<sup>c</sup>

Maybe also from the gift of charisms, and the prospect of conversions due to the convincing power of miracles:

d. v. 17-18. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.<sup>d</sup>

However, we shouldn’t forget that these verses have been preceded by a particularly severe reproach:

e. v. 14. He upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw Him after He had risen.<sup>e</sup>

It was precisely faith that was lacking on Good Friday evening. Basically, the disciples’ joy is probably due mostly to a renewal of their faith. Wouldn’t that be for us an indication, an invitation? We, too, are called to the joy of faith.

The apostles are waiting for a promise to be accomplished, the Father's promise, they are waiting for the Spirit Paraclete to be sent:

But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with Me from the beginning.<sup>a</sup>

a. *Jn 15:26-27.*

The snuffed out Paschal candle is therefore not so much a witness to the disappearance of a visible Christ, as the announcement of a new light, shed into the hearts of those who accept to receive it and become its witnesses before the world. In His death and resurrection, Christ begets billions of human beings in whom He now dwells, billions of small light, more or less flickering, more or less luminous to enlighten the world.

To these small lights each man is called to kindle his own lamp, or to rekindle it if perchance it has been snuffed out. The Lord had foretold it:

And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one Shepherd.<sup>b</sup>

b. *Jn 10:16.*

On this Ascension day, as we listen to the call to mission the Good Shepherd addresses to the disciples, we remember our duty to pray for priestly and religious vocations. Assuredly, each man, each woman is called to be a witness of Christ; but the most beautiful of all testimonies should be that of the men and women who have forsaken everything so as to consecrate themselves to Christ by becoming either a priest, or a religious or a nun. The testimony of faithfulness to a radical and irrevocable gift of their own life, either in an apostolic life or in the silence of the cloister, is self-sufficient. The holy Pope Paul VI affirmed:

Contemporary man listens more willingly to witnesses than to masters, or rather, if he listens to masters, that is because they are themselves witnesses.<sup>c</sup>

c. Audience, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1974.

Holiness is also a way to lead men and women to an encounter with Christ's true face. "Go into all the world... Be

my witnesses.” These words have given rise to so many holy figures, so many messengers of the risen Christ: St. Anthony fleeing to the desert, St. Francis, the poor of Assisi, St. Francis de Sales, so meek. Among these figures, how could we fail to mention Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of priests and religious, the Mother of all the friends of Jesus, and of all men, whom she wants to lead to her Son?

With her and a few other women, the apostles are going to gather in prayer in the Upper Room, waiting for the gift of the Spirit. We too, let us prepare to receive this gift by pondering on the sequence or the hymn of Pentecost. He Whom we received in abundance on the day of our confirmation wishes to keep working in us. He is *Fons vivus, Ignis, Caritas*: “Live Fount, Fire, Love.” From Him we receive life, and we receive life in abundance. May we remain witnesses to this life.

*Veni, Sancte Spiritus! Amen, Alleluia.*

