



## The Ascension of the Lord May 8, 2016 C

- ♥ **Happy Mother's Day!**
- ♥ **Happy Parish Feast Day!**
- ♥ **Parish-wide census**
- ♥ **A word to people in irregular marriage situations**

Mothers, we salute you and thank you on this, your special day! May you feel blessed for the way you co-created new life with our Divine Creator. We thank you for carrying us in your body for nine months, sometimes suffering much in the process. In one of the Easter Season readings, Paul reminds us: “*You must undergo many hardships.*” Mothers, in the course of your life, you have undergone many hardships in your role as mother. If at the end of the day you may not feel appreciated, know that God who sees all things appreciate the way you model his self-giving love to the world.

If at times you feel you have failed in your role as mother, you must forgive yourself because that is what God and Mary, our Mother, would want you to do. Carrying guilt around is soul-destroying. Say sorry to God and to your children and begin anew. If you have a poor relationship with your children or with your own mother, follow the wise advice of the serenity prayer:

*Change what can be changed;  
Accept what can't be changed;  
Pray for the wisdom to know the difference.*

Always remember, we are all in process. God is not finished with us yet. So here below we will often mess up and fail others and ourselves. Say a genuine “sorry” and go on—praying for the grace to do better.

On this day, let us also remember all those women—especially aunts who played a motherly role in our lives. After the death of my mother at age 37, I was blessed to have several unmarried and married aunts who were very important in my formative years. If you had aunts or other ladies who were an important presence in your early years—thank God for them today.

### Prayer for Today's Woman

Since not all women have given birth to children or have adopted children, I share this prayer which is for *ALL* women.

#### *A Prayer for Today's Woman*

*Show me the inherent goodness and beauty of my womanhood and teach me to rejoice in all its aspects.*

*Let me see the dignity of my sex so that I shall never permit anyone to abuse, debase or ridicule it.*

*Show me the wonder of my role as a life-bearer which is not limited to my biological function as a mother but extends to other aspects and situations of my presence in the world; let me recognize my power to nurture, comfort, inspire and guide others as part of the creation process of my life.*

*Fill me with the desire to build up rather than tear down, to heal rather than to wound, to reconcile rather than polarize, to risk rather than to seek compromise and security.*

*Help me to see what is of everlasting value in cultural and religious traditions; help me to forge ahead and to be true to my own nature without being hindered by false assumptions of the past or by passing fads of the present.*

*Let me understand that my femininity is a gift of God to be acknowledged with gratitude and delight; let me know that womanhood is not a situation in conflict with manhood but that both are created equal for the purpose of mutual love and support.*

*Help me to grow according to my own nature so that I may be able to fulfill my destiny according to your will.*

*I pray for all my sisters in the world—may they live as your children in freedom and peace. Amen.*

## PARISH-WIDE CENSUS

At Mass today, I announced my desire to conduct a parish-wide census that I hope will lead us to the homes of the hundreds of Catholics who live in the area but do not come to church on the weekend. I am sure many of you know some of them. They could be members of your own family.

### Making a decision to reach out beyond our comfort zone

I imagine most of you feel that knocking at strangers' doors is outside your comfort zone. But if reaching outside your comfort zone leads someone back to church, wouldn't you feel glad that you were *strong enough and courageous enough* to make that decision?

### Not nearly as hard as you may think

For those of you who may not feel comfortable knocking at a stranger's door, please remember that about 20 of your fellow parishioners have been doing this for months and, to their nice surprise, they have found it to be much easier than they thought. If those 'ordinary' parishioners like you could do it, I am confident you can do it too.

### What a census call involves

Wear a parish badge that reads ASCENSION CATHOLIC—WITH YOUR FIRST NAME. Ideally, before you go out, *pray* asking the Holy Spirit to be with you.

When you ring the doorbell (or knock if you hear no bell), pray, "*In Jesus' name*"—to remind yourself that you're doing this in his name.

Introduce yourself by saying, "Hello, we (or I if on your own) are from Ascension Catholic Church and we are carrying out a parish census. Pause ... Are there any Catholics in this home or anyone who grew up Catholic?"

Expect to get different responses such as: "There are no Catholics here," or "We belong to \_\_\_ church."

Thank them for the information and wish them a blessed day.

As you can see, the above dialog is pretty simple.

**If Catholic.** If you encounter Catholics who also attend Ascension, do share your joy on meeting fellow parishioners. You might say, "Oh, that's great! How long have you been a *member* of Ascension? Do you like the parish?"

**Then,** "For the purpose of our census, do you mind giving us your first and last name."

**If Catholic and non-church-going.** (This may be the most challenging part of your pastoral outreach.) If they say they're Catholic, ask them if they go to Ascension. If they don't, you have the following options, one more challenging than the other.

**Option 1:** Gently ask if they mind sharing why they don't go to church? Listen to what they have to say. If they have had some kind of painful experience, be attentive and try to "feel their pain."

**Option 2:** If you don't feel comfortable asking them why they don't go to church, just offer them the Special Bulletin and say: "Our Pastor, Fr. Tobin, would like to share this bulletin with you. It has all the Mass schedules on the front page. Inside you'll find a list of Ascension ministries with their descriptions. It also contains stories of people who recently returned to the church. Invariably, people are happy to receive the bulletin.

If you meet young parents, ask if they have school-age children. If so, share the school bulletin with them.

If the person seems friendly or somewhat friendly, you could say: "For purposes of our census-taking, do you mind sharing your first and last name (if not clear, ask them to spell it out). Note down the address.

If you're not comfortable asking the person's name, bid him/her goodbye, and on your way out, write down the address and note that the person is Catholic.

### Next weekend—Sign-up Sunday for Volunteers

Next weekend, we will have cards in the pews to give you an opportunity to sign up to be a volunteer in our parish census endeavor.

You can volunteer to take up the census in your own neighborhood or, if you prefer, you can go to another neighborhood. If you belong to a large subdivision, we will of course seek to have several volunteers in that subdivision.

If you do not live in a subdivision or if you live outside the parish, you are welcome to help.

**Training meeting.** If you sign up to be a volunteer, we will have a training meeting:

- ◆ to go over what I have described above with a few more details and to answer any questions;
- ◆ to provide you with copies of the *Special Bulletin* which you can pass out;
- ◆ to provide you with forms to document your visit.

If you need to have someone go out with you to get you started, we will get you someone.

If you are *elderly* and unable to walk or simply cannot do this ministry, *please* pray a lot this week that we will have lots of volunteers sign up next Sunday.

## A WORD TO PEOPLE LIVING IN IRREGULAR MARITAL SITUATIONS

For Catholics, the marital ideal is that every married Catholic has had their marriage blessed by a priest or deacon. But in our church world today, this is frequently not the case. There is a variety of what Pope Francis calls “irregular situations,” as in the following cases:

- ◆ Some couples are not married in the church.
- ◆ Couples live together without being married. Some are not married because marriage would mean the loss of a pension or some other financial benefit. Others are afraid of marriage commitment especially if they had been married before.
- ◆ Some are gay couples.

In the past, it was common—and perhaps still common—to say that all couples in ‘irregular situations’ are “living in sin.” Pope Francis tells pastors to refrain from using that language. The fact is that all of us are, to some extent, ‘living in sin’ in that we are not living perfect lives.

In his *Exhortation on Marriage and the Family*, Pope Francis asks bishops and pastors to *accompany and walk with* Catholics who find themselves in situations other than the ideal marriage. This is something that I try very much to do. I don’t see it as my job to judge persons, but to help them move closer to God and to the church’s belief of a marital ideal, whatever their situation.

**Annulments.** When a divorced Catholic formerly married in the Catholic Church remarries outside the church, he/she should ideally seek to get an annulment for their marriage in the church so that their current marriage can be blessed or sacramentalized in the Catholic Church. Four things to keep in mind about annulments:

- ◆ There are no longer annulment fees in the Diocese of Orlando.
- ◆ One should not assume that he/she has no grounds to seek an annulment. If *previously* told that there are no grounds for annulment, I would encourage him/her to try again.
- ◆ If a person seeking an annulment cannot come up with names of three witnesses (family member or friend to fill out a questionnaire), this is no longer an obstacle in processing an annulment.
- ◆ The granting of a decree of nullity has absolutely no effect on the legitimacy of children from the previous marriage.

*Couples not married in the church* are strongly encouraged to have their marriage sacramentalized if this is possible. Some couples have *no* reason, no

obstacle for not having their marriage blessed in the church. This is a mistake. Marriage is one of the seven sacraments of the church and it would be a mistake not to avail oneself of the graces of this sacrament. If this is not possible, such couples should know that they are still loved by God and can be recipients of God’s grace in other ways.

For more information on annulments or having your marriage blessed in the church, contact Deacon Sergio at 254-1595 x 3082 or [scolon@ascensioncatholicsch.org](mailto:scolon@ascensioncatholicsch.org) — or myself.

## CATHOLIC PRAYER FOR EVANGELIZATION

*Heavenly Father,*

*Stir in my soul the desire to renew my faith and deepen my relationship with your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, so that I might truly believe in and live the Good News.*

*Open my heart to hear the Gospel and grant me the confidence to proclaim the Good News to others.*

*Pour out your Spirit, so that I might be strengthened to go forth and witness to the Gospel in my everyday life through my words and actions.*

*In moments of hesitation, remind me:*

*If not me, then who will proclaim the Gospel?*

*If not now, then when will the Gospel be proclaimed?*

*If not the truth of the Gospel, then what shall I proclaim?*

*God, our Father, I pray that through the Holy Spirit I might hear the call of the New Evangelization to deepen my faith, grow in confidence to proclaim the Gospel and boldly witness to the saving grace of your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Have a blessed week,

