

## Sunday 02 June 2019: The Ascension of the Lord

*While blessing them, he was taken to heaven*



...Jesus directs the disciples to return to Jerusalem to await the fulfillment of his promise to send them the Holy Spirit. Curiously, only Mark and Luke actually report Jesus' Ascension into heaven. Matthew's Gospel concludes with Jesus' promise to remain with his disciples forever. Only the Gospel of Mark notes that Jesus ascended to sit at the right hand of God. In noting this, Mark teaches that Jesus' Ascension affirms the glory Jesus received from God after his death and Resurrection...

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## Pope's Intention for June

*That priests, through the modesty and humility of their lives, commit themselves actively to a solidarity with those who are most poor.*

This month Pope Francis asks us to pray for an intention that has been close to his heart since he first became Pope. He wants us to pray for priests because their place in the life of the Church at every level in local congregations is so vital. He wants us to pray specifically that their attitudes and way of living be modelled on Jesus, who lived simply, focused on what mattered and loved to be with people who were poor and neglected.

In many of his talks to priests Pope Francis contrasts this way of life to clericalism. By this he means an attitude that emphasises the distance between priests and laypeople. It makes central to Catholic life obedience to the detailed laws, customs and beliefs of the Church, and sees the Church as the biggest and only show in town. Pope Francis believes that priests' business is to bring the message of Jesus to people at the edge of the Church and society. They are servants and not bosses.

For Pope Francis this matters because to be a Christian is to be a follower of Jesus called to bring the attractiveness and strength of the Gospel to people at the margins. Priests are called to lead and encourage the people to do this, not to hide the treasure of the Gospel in a locked church.

His intention makes clear what he hopes for in priests: modesty and humility. Modesty is a personal style that prefers to listen rather than to speak, and sees the church community as a 'we together' and not as a 'me over you'. Modesty looks up to the people on the edge of church and not down at them.

Humility means standing on the ground of the reality of ourselves, not on an inflated image of ourselves. The reality is that we are sinners whom God loves and calls each day to follow Jesus. If we see ourselves as weak human beings captured by God's overwhelming love, it will be impossible to see ourselves as superior to others or to see others as unloved by God. Going out to people who are poor and are regarded by the comfortable as a waste of space reminds us of God's love and of who we are.

Pope Francis' ideal is very high, not only for priests but for all Christians. It is a gift, and we should be grateful that we find this gift among priests as often as we do, and pray that it may grow deeper, not simply among priests but in the church as a whole. It is easy to curse the darkness and blame those who live there. It is better to thank God for the candles who give light in the dark night of the church, and so to encourage the priests whom we see going beyond the borders of church to walk with people on the edge. The best way to help priests do this, of course, is for us to invite them to walk with us as we go there.

*Fr Andy Hamilton SJ*