



Dear Friend of the Missions,

I hope that Easter continues to be a blessing to you! This month is filled with special celebrations. Of course, Mothers Day is the May 14th. We will remember them all in a special way. May 10 is the feast of Blessed Damien of Moloka'i, the heroic person who cared for poor people with leprosy. May 15 is the feast of St. Isidore the farmer and his wife, Maria de la Cabeza. They are two wonderful and generous people who achieved sainthood as husband and wife raising a large family. Memorial day is observed on May 29. Please pray for all who have died in war. The Visitation of Mary is on May 31. In this month we especially remember Mary, and the Easter Season continues with the Solemnity of the Ascension on May 25 in the North East and, in many places, on May 28. Thank you for your constant support. Be assured of our prayers!

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The Ascension: Why do you look up?

By Fr. Russell Becker, OFM

Let us become divine because of him, since he for us became human. He took upon himself a low degree that might give us a higher one. He became poor, that through his poverty we might become rich. He took the form of a slave that we might be delivered from slavery. He came down that we might rise up. He was tempted that we might learn to overcome. He was despised that we might be given honor. He died that he might save us from death. He ascended into heaven that we who lie prone may be lifted up to him.--St. Gregory Nazianzen



In the account of the Ascension in the Scriptures, the disciples kept staring skyward after Jesus had disappeared above the clouds. At that point, two angels of the Lord came and asked: *People of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up to the skies?* (Acts 1:11). Three possible answers to this question will draw out the meaning of the Ascension for us.

People of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up to the skies? We look up because we have our eyes on our eternal home. The Ascension is the promise which is held out to us: Christ goes before us to prepare a place for us. We look up because Jesus told us: *I go before... that where I am you may also be* (John 14:3). Christ has ascended to glory. The God who became human draws humanity to glory.

Pope St. Leo the Great in a homily for the Feast of the Ascension said: *The Ascension of Christ thus means our own exaltation as well; where the glorious Head had gone before, the Body is called to follow in hope. Let us therefore exult, beloved, as is fitting, and let us rejoice in devout thanksgiving. For on this day not only have we been confirmed on our possession of paradise, but we have entered heaven in the person of Christ; through his ineffable grace we have regained far more than we had lost through the devil's hatred.*

We celebrate in the heavenly Christ the inheritance that one day will be ours. Places are reserved for us in the Reign of God, giving us the strength to be faithful. Our presence is desired and awaited there. We look up so that we can keep our goal ever before us.

People of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up at the skies? We look up because we often feel helpless and we know that we fail. We look up to see the face of the compassionate Christ who will heal and forgive us. In the Ascension we know that: *We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness* (Hebrews 4:15). The One who has lived through the human experience now reigns in glory. Jesus Christ understands what we go

through and how often and how easily we fall. God is not remote to human experience, for human experience is now in God. We look up just as the poor, the sick and the sinner looked up at Jesus when he walked this earth and we await the look of Jesus now, which will forgive us, heal us and help us.

People of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up to the skies? We look up because we are confused and we do not know what to do. Yet the angel brings our look back to the earth, and the echo of the mission that Jesus gave to his disciples rings in our ears: *Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations ...teaching them all that I commanded you* (Matthew 28:19-20). We are sent forth with power to carry on the work that Jesus began. The angel reminds us that we are not just supposed to sit around and wait for the Second Coming, but we are to hurry it along by building up the Reign of God. We are called to live in the world and to work in it in such a way that this world is elevated to the

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glory to which God calls it. So we look up perhaps to avoid taking on the mission. But the angel directs our gaze back to our mission and we remember the words of Christ: *Know that I am with you always even until the end of time.*

(Matthew 28:20).

Forty days into the celebration of the Resurrection this question is put to us again. We celebrate the feast which reminds us that we have a goal, we have hope and we have a mission.

As St. Gregory Nazianzen said, *Let each one of you give all to Christ; offer all to Christ who gave himself in exchange for us, as the price for our redemption. Amen.*

Reflection Questions

1. How well have we carried the hope of the Ascension in our hearts?
2. How have we participated in the mission Christ gave as he ascended into heaven?
3. What does it mean to wait in joyful hope?

Please pray for our missionary friars on their birthdays:

Br. Winston Guzman-Otayza, O.F.M. (Peru): May 5

Br. Gerald Hudson, O.F.M. (Southern U.S.): May 6

Fr. Juvenal Leahy, O.F.M. (Brazil): May 17

Fr. Stanislaus Widomski, O.F.M. (Japan): May 30

Please also pray for our missionaries and former missionary friars who are ill:

Fr. Champion Lally, O.F.M. (Japan)

Fr. Clement Healy, O.F.M. (Jamaica)

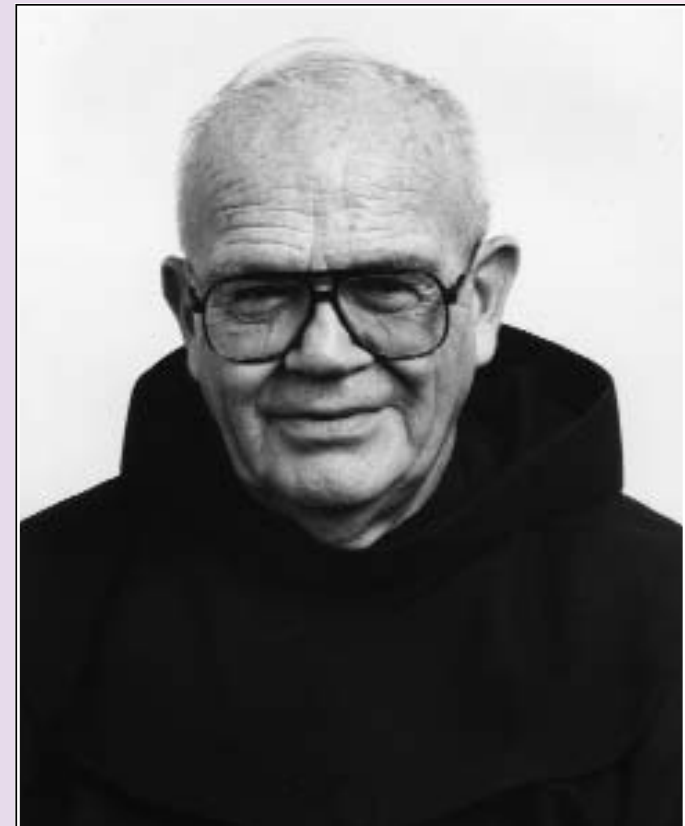
Fr. Theodore Blackowski, O.F.M (Japan)

Fr. Thomas Fox, O.F.M (Brazil)

Fr. Finian Riley, O.F.M. (Africa)

Fr. Robert Nee, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Also on May 22 is the first anniversary of the death of Brother Denis Clark, O.F.M.



May he know the everlasting Easter!