

As you come up to Mount Angel Abbey and Seminary, before you get to the main campus, you have to take a bit of a drive up a hill. This simple yet memorable moment has always stuck with me. My first day of seminary: I was driving with my mom, excited, nervous, not sure what to expect. But yet something was so intriguing to me climbing this road to the seminary. The Hilltop was covered with beautiful lush green trees, along the road are the Stations of the Cross, and there was something mysterious yet peaceful at this moment. We began our drive up, I was looking around with a big smile on my face, and in a couple minutes we came to the place where I would begin my new life as a seminarian. This feeling stopped as the drive ended, but yet it was the ascent is what was so memorable for me, because before I could start my seminary formation, we had to ascend on that hill to arrive at the seminary. I share this image because this is just one simple image of an ascension, a moving upward toward a place that God called me to go, where I truly believe He wanted me to go. Today we remember Christ's Ascension, the time Christ ascends into heaven and sits at the right

hand of the Father, as our mediator, our intercessor. Christ fulfills the Father's will in His Passion and death and completes His mission, after rising from the dead, and then He gives us a mission, to make disciples, to baptize, ending with the assurance of His presence, to sustain us, to bring us to eternal life. But yet what's stopping us from making our own ascensions? Specifically the ascension of our hearts to God in prayer, our relationship with Him who loves us, wants us to open up to Him and seek His face. As we remember Christ's ascension into heaven today, so can we have our own "ascensions" on the journey of holiness and faith, possible even now on earth before entering our eternal dwelling place in heaven.

But this is a hard endeavor isn't it friends? We come to mass every week, we strive to be people of faith and pray, but yet what stops us in our prayer, our journey of holiness? Maybe its what we call "life", our own struggles with our relationship with God, our doubts on why our prayers aren't answered. Maybe we really want to take that hike and see God in nature instead of coming to mass, or those who claim Christ

in their hearts yet make their faith about personal gain than seeking God's will. The ascent is much harder than the descent, the movement upward requires work, an effort on our part to persevere on the road of faith, a constant struggle for sure, even in our own hearts. And on this journey we then get to the point when we plateau, we become satisfied with our routine of prayer, simply coming to mass on Sunday, or believe that we are good with God because of His mercy. But friends we have the grace to do so much more, more than we think possible. God's love is tremendous, as much as we talk about it but it is so much so that no matter what we do, no matter what we say, no matter what we think, God still loves us! But it's not meant to stop there, our relationship with God entails a response to that love, and that response is our intent to push on to uniting our hearts to God in our lives on the road of faith, in prayer, in loving one another, keeping God's commandments, in receiving the Eucharist. God can work incredible things through us if we let Him. Each of us can strengthen this relationship with God in these matters. At the same time, it's not about doing more prayers, coming to

mass more, doing more and more of what Catholics do. It's about that strengthening of our relationship with Him, which absolutely could mean more time of prayer, but it's so much more, it's about realizing that incredible love God has for everyone, with no exclusivity in that love! It's about sharing that love with one another, we as Church are one body held together in that love of God. We are on this journey together.

We're not meant to endure this struggle alone, not only do we have Christ present in our lives, we have each other, we have a family of believers that are all struggling to know God, to understand why we fail, why we fall into sin, why there's evil in the world. But even the smallest effort of turning away from sin, from saying no to the temptations our minds are bombarded with, that small ascension to God is so pleasing to Him. That is what His love is, a great love that even with the smallest of efforts that is enough for Him to work miracles in. We can take tremendous comfort in this today friends, even if it's a simple smile, a kind gesture at home, even what seems so small yet if done with love,

God is at work in these moments. This can inspire us to slowly do more, to see the good in that simple smile and realize making greater strides of holiness will not only bring us the answers we look for, it brings us peace, it helps us to continue on that ascension of our hearts and minds to the Father. Christ's obedience and life gives us the exact means of holiness, by His words and deeds we hear in the Gospels, and brings it to completion in His ascension into heaven, necessary to begin His good work in us. As I knelt before the Archbishop yesterday, promising my obedience, he prayed "may God who has begun the good work in you bring it to fulfillment." I would say that can go for any vocation friends. The good work that He's begun in me, in my brothers who are ordained and about to be ordained, each of us here today are called to heed Christ's words and trust His good work in us. To think that if we make these efforts in loving God and neighbor, that good work will change the world, will change our lives, changing our view of others, seeing others as beloved children of God and our brothers and sisters. And that's to say that's happening even today! Being here in prayer and worship is

the great way of allowing God to begin His work in us. This is why we hold mass to be so central in our faith, why it's necessary for that relationship. The mass not only shows our praise and thanks to God, it sanctifies us, redeems us, it heals us. It sustains us in our journey of faith and gives us the means to push upward in living true Christian lives, simply centered in Christ Himself. And we do so today as a family dear friends, we do this together. Each of us has an intimate and personal relationship with God that no one can take away, yet we are united as a community by our public prayer, our confident proclamation that we are Christians, that we bear the name of Christ and have Christ dwelling within us, especially when we receive the sacred Eucharist, the true food that sustains us and unites us as a community, which is precisely why we call it "communion." We soon will pray the preface dialogue where Father will say "lift up your hearts," which I pray is what each of us do today, seeing Christ's ascension as an inspiration for our own ascensions to the Father in lifting up our hearts to Him in prayer, in joy, in sorrow, at any moment when we need Him, who is with us

always, even to the end of the age. There was an end to the quick journey my mom and I took to arrive to Mount Angel, and the ascent has an end for us, eternal life with the Father. Please remember this dear friends, remember that Christ's word is true, and trustworthy, and that He is with us, He is with us now, will be with us, and will never abandon us. May this day remain in our hearts, may this day be filled with joy, as we continue on this beautiful journey of faith toward heaven, our eternal homeland, where Christ is waiting for us, where Christ is always at work in us.