

- In the Jesuit church of the Gesu in Rome, there's a curious artifact hanging on the wall of one of the side chapels: it's the right forearm and hand of St. Francis Xavier, the great Jesuit missionary and patron saint of the missions.
- St. Francis Xavier baptized hundreds of thousands of people with that right hand that is now preserved at the Gesu. For years he labored in the mission fields, pouring out himself in order to spread the Gospel – and with great success.
- Thus, it's easy to understand why St. Francis Xavier, the friend of St. Ignatius of Loyola, is a patron saint of the missions. For he left everything behind to travel to India and the Far East to evangelize peoples who had never heard of Christ.
- Very curiously, along with St. Francis Xavier, St. Thérèse of Lisieux is Co-Patroness of the missions: a cloistered Carmelite nun, who after entering the monastery at age 15 never left that monastery until she died at the age of 24.
- Yet she was given this title in 1927 by Pope Pius XI because of her desire to be a missionary from a young age, and for the ardent desire she had to save souls.
- So while St. Thérèse's physical life was rooted and fixed within her Carmelite cloister, she had a missionary heart burning with zeal for souls, and a tremendous desire to be in the mission fields of far distant lands.
- Her life as a cloistered Carmelite nun was spent in prayer and contemplation, interceding for souls near and far that they might know our Lord's salvation.
- And St. Thérèse was successful in her "missionary work", if you will, because she excelled in her vocation as a Carmelite nun. Her fidelity to God's will for her life is what endeared her to God so powerfully, and it's why she rose to the very heights of sanctity.

- I bring up missionary work today because, on this feast of our Lord's Ascension into Heaven, our Gospel is the Great Commission.
- After His resurrection, Jesus goes to His 11 apostles in Galilee, saying to them: *Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*
- Our Lord is clear: He wants the apostles to live lives directed to Heaven, both for themselves and for all whom they encounter.
- This is precisely the point of the mystery of the Ascension that we celebrate today. This feast reminds us of what's most important in this life: getting to Heaven!
- In the great mystery of our Lord's Ascension, we are invited to raise our eyes to Heaven, and to follow where the Master has trod. Indeed, today's feast reminds us that we must order and direct our lives toward Heaven.
- Truly, our whole life on earth should be lived with the acute understanding that we are on a journey home. While at times our earthly lives may be painful and tedious, they are never meaningless – and so we must never live life thoughtlessly or in vain.
- Rather, the hope for Heaven must pervade our lives, especially in those difficult moments when our faith is tested and charity is strained.
- Yet, in our hope for our own souls to be saved, we must be ever cognizant of helping other souls get to Heaven, too. That's the point of our Gospel.

- Being a Christian means, at least in part, that we are missionaries in this world – sharing the Good News of the Gospel with others as we *strive to work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling*, as St. Paul says in his Letter to the Philippians.
- Yet, as St. Thérèse teaches us, being a missionary doesn't mean that each of us needs to travel to far parts of the world to spread the Gospel message. We don't have to stand on street corners preaching, or go door to door asking if people know Jesus.
- Truly, the most effective form of evangelization is simply living out our God-given vocation with integrity and zeal. People are attracted to holiness and authenticity. When we practice these virtues with joy, people take note and want to emulate us.
- What draws people to Christ is not so much persuasive words, but a living witness.
- In the same way, a church community has great power to evangelize simply by living the Faith together joyfully, authentically, and with integrity. When people find a church community like that, they naturally want to become a part of it.
- So, really, all that being a missionary requires is living out our vocations well: intentionally, thoughtfully, with joy, zeal, and great charity.
- If you are a husband and father, then be the head of your household, especially the spiritual head – leading your wife and children in prayer and in the practice of the Faith.
- Protect your family from all threatening influences, especially those threats that jeopardize their faith, and provide for them as a provident father should.
- If you are a wife and mother, be the heart of your home: providing the loving warmth and support that enables each family member to flourish. Allow your husband to lead and encourage him in his role. Be a woman of strong prayer and solid virtue.
- If you are a single person, live a life of generous service to others – especially your family. Make extra time to pray now before taking on familial obligations yourself that will make it more difficult to do so, and truly strive for virtue and holiness.
- If you are a student or child, your vocation is to be obedient to your parents and other authority figures in your life, and to excel to the best of your abilities at your studies. Be joyful and dutiful in your obedience and diligent in your studies.
- And if you're called to be a priest or religious, then be faithful to the rule of life set down for you and the promises that you've made to Holy Mother Church. As I mentioned last Sunday, a little simple obedience is worth more than the choicest contemplations.
- My brothers and sisters, we have gathered today to celebrate our Lord's final act of our redemption. Having suffered and died for us, having resurrected from the dead 40 days ago, our blessed Lord now takes His throne in Heaven.
- Inspired by the beauty of this feast, may we keep our eyes fixed firmly on our Lord and on our heavenly home. May our earthly lives, lived prayerfully and virtuously, be a ray and reflection of our Lord's own life on earth.
- And may our integrity of life as Christians help draw many others to our Lord and to His Kingdom. May we each be missionaries by being faithful to the vocations God has given us.
- St. Francis Xavier, pray for us. St. Thérèse of Lisieux, pray for us!