

## 2020 Ascension

1. **Around the day of the Ascension** a French missionary once spoke these words to a laywoman: "When our Lord went to heaven, Mary, his Mother, remained on earth to encourage and support the apostles and the first Christians. Similarly, during the missionaries' absence, you must be the guardian angel of the Catholic Mission and support the faithful." "Father," she answered tearfully, "I will do what I can."  
(Quotation from St. Joseph of Clairval Letter of August 6, 2014)
2. **The woman who said these words is the little known Victoire Rasoamanarivo**, a woman who played a pivotal part in the evangelization of Madagascar in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. 80, 000 Catholic Christians were left to her guidance in the absence of the missionaries.
3. **The mystery of the Ascension of the Lord is a glimpse of the "immeasurable greatness of the power of Jesus Christ"** presently at work in our very messy world of nature and human beings. **Our difficulty** in appreciating the "immeasurable greatness of his power" at work in creation and in the events of history and in the natural world lies in our all too narrow understanding of the reality of the Church which Jesus himself created. **St. Paul opens a window to this reality of the Church:** "he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." (Ephesians 1:22-23) The Church is not just the bond that holds men and women together; it is the glue that both

holds together all creation and **pulls every created thing to its permanent transfiguration in God.**

4. **When God created man and woman in the midst of the visible and invisible world**, he bound all created things to him with an unbreakable bond of existence. So when he recreates it, nothing escapes that "immeasurable greatness of his power." **The Church is not just the bond that holds men and women to Jesus Christ.** It is more than that. It is the bond that holds the whole immense, visible and invisible world, the animate and inanimate world together in Christ, because he himself is that bond! **Nothing escapes his "immeasurable greatness", not even the coronavirus pandemic!**
5. **It is important to reflect on the Ascension from both the angle of Christ's divinity and that of his humanity.** The disciples were amazed and in a stupor: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?" (Acts 1:11) "He ascended into heaven by his own power, as God in divine power [but] also as man in the power of his transfigured soul, which moves his transfigured body, as it will."<sup>1</sup> **As God and as man, "this Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."** (Acts 1:11)
6. **This power given to a man, who is also God, to govern all visible and invisible reality, all animate and inanimate beings, is what he has given to the Church:** "he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him

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<sup>1</sup> John Hardon, *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 43.

who fills all in all.” (Ephesians 1:22-23) Because Christ’s power is so immeasurably great, **the Church makes an unheard-of but realistic commitment and presupposition.** She makes her obedient commitment, beyond the natural strength of her members to “make disciples of all nations, to baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [to] **teach them to observe all that Jesus has commanded.**” (Matthew 28:19-20)

7. **It’s an absolute unhesitating conviction, unswerving, relentless, persevering.** The power of Christ’s Ascension has anticipated her every missionary effort and preceded her into every missionary land. Before she arrives on the scene, he is present in his Spirit, pulling all people and things to himself. **It is the Church’s social teaching that pulls all creation back to Christ and the Blessed Trinity.**
8. **After the French missionaries left Tananarive, that fateful May 29, 1883, all the churches were closed.** The following Sunday, Victoire, a member of the royal household, obtained their reopening both in the city and in the countryside. The Christians, overjoyed, begged her to leave the out-of-the-way seat which she usually took and placed her along the main aisle.
9. **In October of 1883, Victoire convened all the leaders of the Christian communities and the Catholic teachers.** “It is false,” she told them, “that the Catholic religion has been

banned by the government, as the Protestants claim. On the contrary the Queen and the Prime Minister allow complete freedom. May the faithful remain undisturbed by the persecutions directed at them, for persecution is the inseparable companion of the Catholic Church.”<sup>2</sup> **In the meantime she prayed fasted, mortified herself and worked tirelessly for the Christians.** When the missionaries finally returned to Madagascar in 1886, after greeting the new apostolic vicar of Madagascar, she took her humble place in the parish again, continuing her work with the lepers and prisoners.

10. **The mystery of the Ascension unleashes in us this immeasurable power of Christ,** not just for missionary work but also for the work of our own transfiguration and that of all creation. As Pope John Paul II said on the occasion of her beatification, “In the sacrament of Baptism she truly allowed herself to be seized by the presence of the resurrected Christ...”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Quotations from Newsletter of St. Joseph of Clairval Abbey, August 6, 2014. Can be accessed at <https://www.clairval.com/lettres/en/2014/08/06/2060814.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.