

## **Feast of the Ascension**

**Today we gather as a faith community to celebrate the Feast of the Ascension. Jesus ascends to the Father in the midst of his disciples. We in the United States also celebrate Memorial Day this weekend. A day dedicated to those who have given their lives in defense of our country and its values.**

**I would like to share a story with you which brings out the richness of both celebrations. The story is about a young man named Is named Eliad. Eliad was born twenty years ago in Libya, Northern Africa.**

**He grew up in a country in political disarray. In recent years the central government has been propped up by outside countries and the United Nations. The real power in the country is organized militarized gangs who controlled different parts of the country through force.**

**Eliad had only one desire: to live in freedom and security.**

**He knew there was no legal way emigrate out of his country so he got on one of the crowded boats, the kind that often tipped over, and took the dangerous trip across the Mediterranean ocean landing in**

Greece. After being placed in a refugee camp for a few months, he escaped. His goal was to make it to a country in Western Europe. Since he could find no way to get clearance to Germany or England, he went to one of the Eastern European countries. Eliad spent the next year in another refugee camp in Eastern Europe before a Christian group from near Grand Rapids, Michigan sponsored him to come to the United States.

Eliad was interviewed on National Public Radio the other day. He said he arrived in Grand Rapids, Michigan three years ago and was put into a special six months program to learn American customs. He then enrolled into a local high school where he began by taking English as a second language courses. He has graduated from high school and is now in a community college with the goal of attending Michigan State University. He has his green card and is getting well established in America.

When asked about the whereabouts of his parents and three siblings, he said they have fled the chaos in Libya and are now in Uganda. He hopes one day to have them come and live with him in the United States.

Asked why he wanted them to come here, he said that the United States, with all its challenges was a land of peace and security. When asked what would say to President Trump about his ban on immigrants of people from Libya, he said he would tell him that he wants no more that President Trump's grandparents wanted when they immigrated to the United States...the opportunity to live in freedom and peace.

Pause

And what does this story have to do with the celebration of Memorial Day and the Feast of the Ascension. The connection with Memorial Day is quite obvious. In the midst of our holiday weekend, we take time to honor and pray for those who have given their lives in the service of our country, those who have sacrificed life and limb to defend the values of freedom and peace, for people like Eliad and you and me.

The connection of Eliad's story to the Feast of the Ascension may seem less obvious but may have even more relevance to our daily lives. I ask you,

Have you ever felt that were running in circles,  
trapped in the rat race of life,  
depressed over the same activities and bills which you can never overcome?

- Whether it is the daily grind taking care of young children with their need for food and cleaning,
- Or whether it is going to the same job day in and day out but never seem to be getting ahead,
- Or whether it is trying to help someone or a community in need but never seeming to get over the challenges which face you.

Then you could be experiencing the same thing as Eliad felt who for eighteen years felt trapped in the chaos of Libya. It is a rut which can wear you down and ruin your spirit.

Well if you have ever faced experiences which simply drains the life out of you, the Feast of the Ascension should give you hope. Because the Feast of the Ascension celebrates the fact that Jesus has risen

- Risen above the chaos of troubled families and failed nations,
- Risen above the challenges of raising children, keeping a job and paying bills,
- Risen above the frustrations of troubled relationships.

**We celebrate that in his Ascension, Jesus has risen and gone back to the Father. We also celebrate that ALL of us will also one day to arise and ascend to be with him in the Kingdom of His Father.**

**Just as Eliad desires to have his family join him in the United States, in today's gospel Jesus, at the moment of his Ascension, sends us out to make disciples to announce Good News to ALL nations. We are called to announce to all the world that not the Kingdom of the Kingdom of God is in our midst, a kingdom which can free us not only from the fear of the daily dangers which surround us, but from the fears of guilt and sin and death.**

**On the very day of his Ascension, Jesus challenged his disciples (and continues to challenge us, his disciples) to go out and announce his Good News to the ends of the world. We may not own National Public Radio to get the word out, but we DO have over 1.1 billion Catholics**

**in the world, over 2 billion Christians, many of whom will be gathering this weekend to celebrate the Feast of the Ascension.**

**As disciples of the Lord, let us rejoice that the risen Lord who has gone to prepare a place for us. For just as Eliad has found a home in Grand Rapids, so Jesus has gone to his Father, to prepare a place for us. He has promised us it will be a kingdom of justice and love and of peace. Where he has gone, we will follow.**