

Ascension, 2008
St. Raphael, Springdale, AR

I spend quite a lot of time every week in counseling married couples. Sometimes, couples are struggling to communicate and need some advice and guidance. Others are on the verge of divorce and look at me as a last resort. And still others have already gotten divorced and seek healing and a new sense of direction. Well, many years ago, I heard the best advice for couples. A lady once told me: "my job as a wife is to get my husband to heaven." And we can say the same for husbands: their job is to get their wife to heaven. Have you ever thought about your vocation in that way? In other words, stop worrying about all the things you don't like about your spouse, and how you wish he or she would change, and start thinking about what you can do to help them get to heaven. That totally changes our thinking about being married, doesn't it?

Of course, that advice isn't limited to husbands and wives; it applies to all of us and our relationships. Parents have to get their children to heaven, and children have to get their parents to heaven. Friends have to get each other to heaven. Priests are supposed to get deacons to heaven and deacons are supposed to get priests to heaven. I'll give you one guess which one of us has it harder! It also depends on who is the deacon! But you see, that's our basic job description as Christians: get people, as many people as possible, to heaven, by our words, our actions, our prayers and sacrifices.

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension. We recall how Jesus ascended into heaven 40 days after rising from the dead. But do you remember what Jesus' final words were to His disciples? He said: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." In other words, Jesus' "last will and testament" (sort of say) was that His disciples continue His work after He returned to heaven. And what was Jesus' work: to get as many people as possible to heaven. And that's precisely why Jesus would later send them His Holy Spirit: who gives the "tools of the trade," the gifts and the graces to help others get to heaven. Just like that smart lady told me: "my job is to get my husband to heaven."

This past week a friend sent me this little joke by email. Sr. Mary Ann, who worked for a home health agency, was making her rounds visiting homebound patients when she ran out of gas. She walked to a nearby gas station to borrow a gas can and buy some gas. The attendant told her that the only gas can he owned had been loaned out. As Sr. Mary Ann walked back to her car, she suddenly had another idea how to get the gas. She carried a bedpan in the car for a patient of hers and decided to use it to transport the gas. She carried the bedpan to the station, filled it with gas, and carried the full bedpan to the car. As she was pouring the gas into her car, two Baptists watched from across the street. One of them turned to the other and said: "If it starts, I'm turning Catholic!" You know, I am sure there's a

Baptist minister somewhere using that joke in order to convert Catholics! But the point is we should always be witnesses of Jesus; that nun was doing that just by wearing her habit. You see, our job is to get others to heaven.

You sometimes hear the debate about whether or not people who don't know Jesus will get to heaven. I'll never forget the answer that Pope John Paul II gave to that question. He said: "We don't know if those people will go to heaven or not, we will trust in God's mercy. But what we do know is that if we don't share our faith with them, **we won't get to heaven!**" In other words, when we fail to evangelize we put our own salvation in jeopardy. Our fundamental job as Christians is to get others to heaven, and it's so important a job that our own salvation hangs in the balance.

This weekend 80 young people will receive the sacrament of Confirmation. They will receive the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised in the gospel, who will give them the power to share their love for Jesus with others. As adult Catholics, they, too, are given one fundamental job: to get others to heaven, by your words, by your actions, by your prayers and by your sacrifices. That job is so crucial that your own salvation depends on it. Husbands have to get their wives to heaven and wives have to get their husbands to heaven. Deacons have to get priests to heaven and priests have to get deacons to heaven. Folks, there are 6 billion people in the world today: we have a lot of work to do.

Praised be Jesus Christ!