

## **May 24, 2020-The Ascension of the Lord**

### **Academy of the Sacred Heart**

Madeleine Sophie Barat, founder of the Society of the Sacred Heart (which operates the Academies of the Sacred Heart) was born December 12, 1779, in France.

During the French Revolution (1789-99), many Christian schools were closed. Education—particularly for young girls—was almost non-existent. Madeleine’s older brother, Louis, became her first teacher. At 16, she went with him to study in Paris, where she learned about plans for a new religious congregation specializing in education. In 1800, Madeleine and three others consecrated their lives to the Sacred Heart. They took over a small girls’ school in Amiens, France, and quickly expanded their ministry.

In 1805, Society of the Sacred Heart drafted a plan of studies to ensure high standards in all of their schools. Their goal was to educate the “whole person”—a relatively unique concept at the time. In 1806, Mother Barat was elected superior general of the Society of the Sacred Heart—a position she held for 63 years. Under her guidance, the society spread throughout France and Switzerland. In 1865, she was stricken with paralysis and died on May 24, the feast of the Ascension. She was canonized on this day in 1925; her feast is May 25.

Today more than 150 Academies of the Sacred Heart are in 41 countries worldwide.

St. Rose Philippine Duchesne started the first Academy of the Sacred Heart in the United States. In 1818, Mother Barat sent her as a missionary to the Louisiana Territory. In Missouri, she established the first “free school” in a log cabin west of the Mississippi. She soon added six more schools, but the task was not easy for her. Her French teaching style was unfamiliar, and her English was terrible. She died in 1852, thinking her life was a failure.

Rose Philippine Duchesne was canonized July 3, 1988.

### **Witnesses to the Ascension**

Eleven apostles went to Galilee to the mountain to which Jesus had summoned them. Among the 11 were Matthew and John. Interestingly, neither Matthew or John provide an account of a visible Ascension in the Gospels.

After the resurrection, Jesus appeared visibly to his disciples. It’s not as though Jesus settled in with them for days at a time. These were sporadic manifestations which the disciples were privileged to receive. His “home” was at the right hand of God, and it was from there that he appeared.

These appearances came to an end, as is dramatized by a visible ascension of Jesus rising to the sky and no longer returning to the disciples in this way. This is his last appearance when he takes leave of his followers in visible form. It’s this image that usually comes to mind when I hear that word “ascension”.

Theologian Karl Rahner called the Ascension the “feast of the future of creation” since, because of the ascension of Christ, we are “the most sublime of materialists.” We can no longer picture a future without matter. Flesh has been redeemed and glorified, which means that matter will last forever and be glorified forever. Thus Rahner says, the Ascension is the beginning of the transformation of all creation.

The ascension of Jesus in his humanity is a sign of things to come for all of us and for all creation because Christ has brought part of this earth to God.

It is the beginning of what is to come, a cause for hope in a world that all too often is gloomy about its own future.