

Ascension of our Lord C/2010

After the celebration of the resurrection of our Lord with Easter, we come to the feast of his glorification in heaven. The mystery we celebrate in the Ascension is the same mystery that we have celebrated in the resurrection of our Lord, but from another angle. In fact, if God has raised Christ from the dead, it was so that he sits at his right hand and becomes the Lord of the living and the dead. That is why Ascension and Resurrection are just two faces of a same coin, namely the glorification of our Lord.

All the readings of this blessed day highlight the mystery of the exaltation of Jesus in heaven. They invite us to share in the joy of his Ascension, because where he is now is where we, too, will be. The first reading describes, in particular, the scene of his ascension, his promise of the Holy Spirit and the commissioning of the apostles to bear witness to him until he comes back again.

That Jesus has ascended to the Father does not mean that he has left us alone. In fact, according to his promise “to be with us always until the end of time”, it means that Jesus is still with us, in a different way, through the power of the Holy Spirit. What has changed is only the form of his apparition to the world; but he is still the same person, operating the same signs and performing the same miracles in order to strengthen us. Before Easter, he could only be seen in one place at a time; he could only speak to the people he was with at that time. Now all these limits have been removed; he is in the glory of his Father, but still close to us forever and everywhere.

That is why the letter to the Hebrews presents him as our High Priest who entered the sanctuary of God, once and for all, in order to offer his own blood for our salvation. As our High Priest, he takes away our sins and will come again to bring salvation to us who eagerly await him. Therefore, in spite of our present situation of suffering and hardships, we have to be joyful in the awaiting. We have to approach the sanctuary of God in this feast of the Ascension with a sincere heart and absolute trust in Jesus, our savior.

That Jesus is now in glory at the right hand of the Father does not mean that we have to lose interest in the things of this world. On the contrary, we have to work hard in order to transform and to change the conditions of the present world, in anticipation of the Kingdom to come. The more we transform this world in fidelity to Jesus and his word, the more we give witness to the world that we belong to Jesus. In doing so, we show that our faith in Jesus can make a difference in the world. This is a task we have to take seriously. No one has the right to say that, because we are waiting the return of the Lord, we have nothing to do in this world.

It is in that sense we have to interpret the words of the angels to the disciples: “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking at the sky”? The looking up to sky is the attitude of passivity that has characterized some Christians after Jesus’ death. Instead of looking down to earth and committing themselves very seriously to transforming the world, many kept looking up at the sky, vainly waiting for the imminent return of Jesus.

The angels are telling us: “Men and women, this is your time to transform the world. Do something to make the world and the earth a better place for future generations”. We need to stand up; we need to take seriously our religion as a stimulus to work at bettering the lives of our fellows in the world. Even if this world is passing, we should never forget, however, that the essence of our religion is not only to care for the soul, but also for the body. After all, a man is a unity of the soul and the body. We have to take care of the one without neglecting the other.

All that helps us understand the importance of the mission Jesus gives to his disciples in today’s Gospel. They have to preach his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. They have to bear witness of everything that he has done for the salvation of the world. The essence of that mission can be summarized in a few words, namely to evangelize the whole world and to bring the good news of salvation to all human kind.

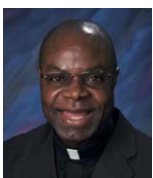
Today, that mission is given to us who are disciples of Jesus and are walking in the footstep of the apostles. That mission is given to us so that we make the church grow by announcing the kingdom of God. Today we have become the mouth that Jesus uses for speaking to people and the hands he uses in order to touch people.

This mission is not easy, but it is not impossible. In this mission the grace of God is accompanying us in whatever situation we might find ourselves, until the end of the world. That is why Jesus has left us his Holy Spirit in order to assist us and guide us in the meander of our human history, with all its ups and downs.

The feast of the Ascension reminds us that, as a church, we have received a mission from Jesus. We have to proclaim him to the world and we have to evangelize. In this mission, we are not alone, because his Spirit is with us amid the sufferings we endure for his name.

The feast of the Ascension reminds us that as individuals, each one of us has received a particular mission from the Lord to be a mother and a father, a husband and a wife, religious man and woman or a priest, catechist or Eucharist minister, etc., we should not be afraid, because he is always with us.

Let us ask him to bless us in our mission. Let us ask him to bless the effort of the evangelization done by many missionaries throughout the world! May the glorified Jesus be a source of strength and encouragement for those who are worn out by hardships and problems! May God bless you all!



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