

Ascension of the Lord A/2011

All the readings of this feast of Ascension draw our attention to the mystery and the joy of the glorification of our Lord in Heaven. They also invite us to the celebration of the beginning of the Church's journey as a response to the recommendation of our Lord Jesus to bring the Good News of heaven to the whole world.

At the origin of the feast of Ascension is the resurrection of Jesus. As St Paul says, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, there would not be faith in him. Likewise, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, he would not have ascended into heaven. That is the reason why the resurrection of Jesus and his Ascension in heaven are like two sides of a same coin, namely his glorification at the right of the Father.

As St Paul shows in the letter to the Ephesians, God has exercised his great might in raising Jesus. By doing so, he sat him at his right hand in the heavens, far above every principality, authority, power, dominion and name not only of those existing now, but even of those generations to come.

In that sense, the resurrection and the Ascension are important moments of the mystery of Jesus' life. By raising Jesus and by letting him throne at his right hand, God has not only put everything beneath his feet, but he also has made him the head of everything that exists in the universe, including the Church, which is his body.

In order to celebrate adequately this mystery, we have to ask God to give us his spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we come to truly know him. We have to ask him also to enlighten the eyes of our hearts so that we come to know the hope of our call, the rich glory of our inheritance and the greatness of his power that is beyond everything. Then, we can understand that Christ who has ascended into heaven is always with us now, as well as he will come again.

What we have today in the Acts of the Apostles is the description of the life of Jesus from his beginning, his death and his resurrection to the Ascension in heaven. The point of Luke by writing this portion of history is to show us that Jesus is truly a historic person who, though he was the son of God, lived in this world, suffered, died, rose and eventually went back to his Father in heaven.

Two important moments cross the narrative Luke gives on the life of Jesus, namely the promise of the Holy Spirit and his consequence for the work of the Church; and, then, the reality of the Ascension and its parallel in the second coming of Jesus.

First of all, Jesus recommends the apostles to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. This recommendation is very important, because the Holy Spirit is not only the counselor who will help the disciples walk in the ways of Jesus, but he is also the fulfillment of the promise of the ever presence of Jesus until the end of time. Most importantly, the Holy Spirit will make the disciples and the Church witnesses who can stand for the truth of Jesus and give testimony about him all over the world.

Second, Jesus warns the apostles about the speculation over the restoration of the kingdom of Israel, which is, in fact, symbolic of the restoration of the kingdom of God. For our Lord, indeed, it serves no purpose to know the times or the seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. That is a secret and a mystery that belongs to him alone. In that perspective, what they have to do is to keep vigil and be ready so that anytime he returns they might not be taken by surprise.

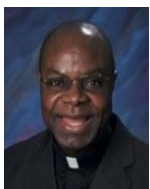
Is not this warning ever present even today? How many people in the history of mankind have always tried to violate the secret of God by pretending to predict, to their dismay, the end of the world and the return of Jesus? Is not that a sign that we, human beings, are not respectful of the distance between God and us? And yet, as human beings, we are ignorant of so many things that are in the mind and the nature of God. The drama of our generation, however, is that we just do not want to confess that ignorance.

Another interesting thing in this text is the words of the angels to the disciples who were intently looking at the sky as Jesus was going. In truth, these words are not of congratulation, but of a reproach. The sense of this reproach is to tell us that Jesus is not to be looked for in the sky. Rather, we have to find him in our commitments in society and in the activities of life. Helped by his word, we have to transform the world and make it a viable place for each one of God's children.

This reproach clarifies also the meaning of Ascension. In fact, the Ascension does not mean that Jesus is now hidden in the clouds of heaven, far from us. It means only that our Lord is not submitted anymore to the limitations of time, space and the material world. In the same way, heaven does not mean some place beyond the sky, but rather a state of blessedness where we will be with God forever.

It is only in that spirit that we can understand the mission Jesus gives to the apostles in today's Gospel to teach, to baptize in the Holy Trinity and to make disciples of all nations. That mission is what we have to continue today as a Church. In fact, we have to make Jesus present in the world and to the others until the end of the world. We have to continue the work of evangelization in the world so that people may come to know Jesus and receive the eternal salvation. Let us pray together that the Risen Lord may without ceasing help us preach him to the world with boldness, courage and persistence. May he bless the apostolate of the Church and our leaders! May God bless you all!

Acts 1, 1-18; Ephesians 1, 17-23; Matthew 28, 16-20



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