

Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord B/2012

All the readings of this solemnity talk about the Ascension of our Lord Jesus into heaven. They describe how, after his resurrection from the dead, our Lord was taken into heaven where he sits henceforth at the right hand of the Father. Most importantly, they invite us to realize that where Jesus is, there we will be too, and we will share in his glory.

The first reading of the Acts of the Apostles describes the historical context that surrounded the Ascension of our Lord. It highlights in particular the circumstances of the life of Jesus, his teaching and his resurrection from the dead. It also recalls the events linked to his death and his resurrection and how he appeared alive to the apostles by many proofs and promised them the Holy Spirit.

The text shows that it was when the disciples were gathered around the Lord as he was instructing them that he was taken into heaven. The disciples who were surprised by the event remained astounded until the angels who came from heaven called them into action.

What is behind this text is, first of all, the truth on the Ascension of our Lord who is now in the glory of his Father. Another idea is the fact that, in spite of being in the glory of the Father, Jesus continues to animate the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. That is the reason why the text insists on Jesus inviting the disciples to wait until they receive the realization of the promise from the Father. The last idea that comes out of the text is related to the second coming of Jesus. Although we do not know the time and the moment, at least we have to be prepared because Jesus will come back as he promised.

All that helps us understand the main focus of today's Gospel as it speaks of the Ascension of the Lord. The starting point of the Gospel recalls a speech that Jesus gave when gathered with his disciples before being raised to heaven.

First of all, the Gospel describes the mission Jesus gave to his apostles to go throughout the whole world and to proclaim the Good News to all the creatures. In this speech, Jesus recommends his apostles to baptize all those who will believe in him through their work.

He also announces that those who will not believe in him through the work of the apostles will be condemned. In the same way, he highlights the signs that will accompany the teaching of the apostles. It was only after all this that he was taken into heaven.

What do we learn from these readings? The first thing we learn is about the truth of the Ascension. The Ascension of our Lord, indeed, does not mean his departure from this earth, because Jesus is always present with us until the end of time. Neither does it mean that the Lord is now hidden in the cloud of heaven. What it means, rather, is that the risen Lord is no more submitted to the limitations of time, space and the material world. He lives now beyond space and time.

That is the reason why the feast of the Ascension and the feast of the Resurrection are the celebration of a single mystery of the glorification of the Lord. They are like the two

sides of a same coin, which is the enthronement of our Lord at the right hand of the Father.

It is for that reason, too, that St Paul says in the second reading that God has exercised the greatness of his power by raising Christ from the dead and by letting him sit at his right hand in the heavens. By doing so, God made him the Lord of every principality, authority, power, and dominion, and even of every name that exists, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. In that sense, everything that exists is put beneath Christ's feet so that he is the head of all things in the universe, as well as of the Church which is his body.

The second thing I want to highlight is about the importance of the mission of the Church. Jesus formulates that mission in a very clear way when he recommends his disciples to go throughout the world to preach the Gospel and baptize those who believe.

As it appears, the core of the mission is the proclamation of the Gospel so that people may come to faith and might be saved. Once they have shown their belief in Jesus, then, they can be baptized. This mission is the main reason of the existence of the Church. It is given to the apostles; but it is also today given to us who continue the work the apostles have started.

That Jesus recommends us to preach the Gospel so that people may come to salvation does not mean that this world with everything in it loses its interest. On the contrary, a big part of the mission is also, while we bring the good news to people, to transform the conditions of the present world with the message of Jesus. In that sense, the Gospel becomes a factor of the transformation of the world and the world itself becomes a field where we have to practice the Gospel.

I believe that is the reason why the Angels were reproaching the men of Galilee for standing passively looking at the sky instead of being active. In that perspective, it is absolutely clear that our commitments in the world and on a daily basis are really important. Of course, Jesus is in heaven where we will find him one day, but Jesus has to be found also here in the world through people as they are inspired by the Gospel of Jesus.

Let us pray, then, that the Lord may help us to really give the best of ourselves to the proclamation of the Gospel. Let us ask him to bless the work of all the missionaries throughout the world. May he be clement and merciful especially on those who work in Muslim lands where Christians are in minority! May God bless you all!

Acts of Apostles 1: 1-11; Ephesians 1: 17-23; Mark 16: 15-20



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