

Ascension of the Lord C/2013

All the readings of this day focus on the Ascension of our Lord Jesus into heaven. They describe, in particular, the event of Jesus ascent to the Father. They also give us the assurance that where Jesus has gone, there we will also be.

The first reading of the Acts of the Apostles describes the historical context of the Ascension of our Lord in heaven. It highlights the circumstances of the life of Jesus, his teaching and his resurrection from the dead. It also recalls the events of his passion, death, resurrection and the promise of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the text describes what happened at the Ascension, how while the disciples were gathered around the Lord as he was instructing them, he was taken into heaven before their eyes. Surprised and astounded as they were by the event, they were brought to reality when an angel from heaven came and talked to them.

What is behind this text is the idea that by his Ascension, Jesus is in the glory of his Father. Another idea is about the permanent presence of Jesus in his Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. That is why the text insists on Jesus inviting the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until the reception of the Holy Spirit. The last idea is about the second coming of Jesus which is unknown, which prompts us to be prepared for it every day.

All that helps us understand the stakes of today's Gospel as it speaks of the Ascension of the Lord. In fact, the Gospel starts with Jesus talking to his disciples about the meaning of his life, how he had to go through his passion, death and resurrection. Then, the Gospel speaks of the mission Jesus gave to the disciples to preach in his name to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem and to be his witnesses. The Gospel speaks also of the promise of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the Gospel relates the event of the Ascension of Jesus to heaven. It shows how after it took place, the disciples joyfully returned to Jerusalem and were continually in the temple praising God.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first point I want to highlight is the joy of the Ascension. In fact, the Gospel says that after his Ascension, the disciples "returned to Jerusalem with great joy and they were continually in the temple praising God".

But, how did it come that they were joyful? Why were they happy instead of being sad? Is it not that when we lose our beloved ones or that we cannot see them anymore, we are sad and gloomy until, maybe, we get used to the loss? In fact, the disciples were praising God because they knew that Jesus, who went to his Father, did so in order to prepare for them a place. In that perspective, where he went, was the place they, too, should be.

That has a consequence for us. It means that whatever might be our life on earth, whatever might be the things we can go through, we are certain that one day we will share in the joy of heaven where Jesus has preceded us. In that sense, our present situation of sickness, crisis, ups and downs of life, is nothing compared to the glory that awaits us.

Moreover, Jesus became a human being for our sake; he died and rose again for us. In the same way, by ascending to the Father, he does it for our good too. That is why, in

the Gospel of St John, for instance, Jesus says, “It is much better for you that I go, if I fail to go, the Paraclete will never come to you” (John 16: 7). The going to the Father coincides with the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, whose role is to teach us and remind us of the teaching of Jesus.

Therefore, we are not alone and we will never be alone. Jesus is present in our midst through the power of his Holy Spirit. Before Easter, he could be only at one place and speak to the people who were with him. With the Ascension, all the limitations of time and space are forever removed so that he is now close to us more than ever through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The second point I want to highlight is about the task of transforming the world. Let me state it this way with Jesus, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” or with the angels, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking at the sky”?

The meaning of these injunctions is that, though Jesus is now in heaven where we will join him, we should not lose interest in the things of this world. In fact, we have received a mission not only of transforming the world with the word of Jesus, but also of making it a better place for the future generations.

We have to change the conditions of the present world, in anticipation of the Kingdom of God we are waiting for. The more we transform this world in fidelity to Jesus, 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 and in the people. No one has the right to say that because we are awaiting the return of the Lord, we have nothing to do in this world.

The essence of our faith is not only to care for the soul, but also for the body. After all, a person is a unity of the soul and the body. We have to take care of the one without neglecting the other. We have to evangelize the world, cultures and people, announcing to them the good news of Jesus that can transform their life and their world.

The feast of the Ascension reminds us that, as a church, we have received a mission from Jesus to become his mouth and his hands. 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 each one of us has received a particular mission to be a mother or a father, a husband or a wife, a religious or a priest, a catechist or a minister of the Church. May he bless our mission! May he bless in particular our mothers we are celebrating today! May he bless the effort of evangelization done by many missionaries throughout the world! May Jesus be a source of strength for those who are worn out by hardships and problems! May God bless you all!

Acts 1: 1-11; Hebrews 9: 24-28; 10: 19-23; Luke 24: 46-53



Homily Date: May 12, 2013

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Document Name: 20130512homily.pdf