

Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord B/2015

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 at the right hand of the Father. 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 his life and his teachings. It also recalls the events related to his passion, death and resurrection by showing how he appeared alive to the apostles, giving them many proofs and promising them the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the text recalls the last gathering of the disciples with the Lord and his ascension into heaven. After that, it signals the astonishment of the apostles and the apparition of angels who called the inhabitants of Galilee into action.

What is behind this text is the idea that Jesus Christ is alive and in the glory of the Father. Another idea is the truth that though in heaven, Jesus is still present in the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. The last idea is related to the return of the Lord who will come back at the end of time.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as it speaks of the Ascension. First of all, the Gospel highlights the mission that Jesus gave to the disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all the creatures and to baptize. It also shows the fate of those who will believe and those who will not believe in the Good News of the Kingdom of God brought by Jesus. The Gospel ends up with the truth of the Ascension in heaven.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the reality of the Ascension. In fact, the Ascension of our Lord does not mean that Jesus has left us to our fate on earth because he is in heaven. On the contrary, he is always with us until the end of time.

If that is true, what, then, does the Ascension mean? The Ascension means that the risen Lord is no more subject to the limits of time, space and the material world. He lives now beyond the limitations of 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 two sides of the same coin, which is the enthronement of our Lord at the right hand of the Father.

It is for that reason that St Paul says in the second reading that God has exercised the greatness of his power by raising Jesus from the dead and by letting him sit at his right hand in the heavens. He says also that 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 the Church, which is his body.

Because Jesus is with his Father in heaven without ceasing to be present with us on earth, the Church, which is his body, has a particular mission by making Jesus known to all the nations of the earth. That mission is the reason why the church exists. At the beginning of the Church, that mission was given to the apostles. Today, that mission is given to us who continue the work of the apostles. That makes of us heirs of the heritage received from Christ.

The outcome of that mission is that those who believe will be saved while those who will not believe will be condemned for failing to take advantage of such a great opportunity to work for their eternal salvation.

That people have to come to their eternal salvation through the preaching of the Gospel does not mean that the matters of the world become meaningless. On the contrary, a big part of the mission is also that, while we bring the Good News to the people, we might be capable of transforming the conditions of the 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 truth of 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 becomes 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 he has to be found also here in the world, through people as they are inspired by his Gospel.

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 apostolate of the missionaries working throughout the world. May he be merciful and clement especially on those who work in Muslim lands, where Christians are a minority! May God bless you all!

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



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