

Solemnity of Ascension C/2016

All the readings of this day talk about the Ascension of our Lord Jesus into heaven. They describe the event of his ascent to the Father as the crowning of his mission on earth. They invite us to live in 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 into 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.

After that, the text recalls 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. Finally, the text ends up with the apparition of the angels who invited the disciples to realism and reassured them of the return of Jesus.

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 the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. The last idea is related to the second coming of Jesus which, though it will happen at an unknown time, prompts us to prepare ourselves for it every day.

This text allows us to understand the stakes of today's Gospel as it speaks of the Ascension of the Lord. The Gospel starts with Jesus talking to his disciples about the meaning of his life, including his passion, death and resurrection. Then, it speaks of the mission given to the disciples to preach to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem and to be his witnesses. After that, the Gospel speaks of the promise of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel ends up with the description of the event of the Ascension of Jesus to heaven. Finally, 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? Today I want to talk about the joy of the Ascension. In fact, the Gospel states that after the Ascension of Jesus into heaven, the disciples "returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple praising God".

That is a little bit paradoxical. In fact, when people lose a beloved one, for instance in death, they are sad because they know they will not see him again and enjoy his presence. On the contrary, the disciples are joyful that Jesus is gone. That joy is understandable on the grounds that they knew that Jesus' departure aimed at preparing them a place. In that sense where he went, there they, too, will be with him.

Such a vision has some consequences for us. First, if where Jesus is, there we will be, it means that in spite of all the hardships and difficult times we have now, we have the certainty that one day we will share in the joy of heaven where Jesus has preceded us. In that sense, our present situation with all its short lived experiences is nothing in comparison to the glory that awaits us.

Second. Though Jesus has ascended to the Father, he does not leave us orphans. In that sense, his going to the Father is beneficial to us in the sense that it gives him an opportunity to send us the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we are not alone and we will never be alone. Jesus is still present in our midst through the power of his Holy Spirit. Moreover,

if before Easter, he could be only at one place and speak to the people with whom he was; now, with the Ascension, all the limitations of time and space are removed so that he is close to us more than ever through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Does it mean that now that Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, there is nothing else we can do than to expect his return in glory? No. Jesus leaves us a mission. He wants us to be his witnesses from Jerusalem to the end of the world. That is why the words of angels to the disciples seem to be like a reproach that they have become passive. As the Gospel says: “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking at the sky”?

If that is true, then, we understand that our duty in the awaiting of the return of the Lord is to transform the world, to make it a better place for the future generations. But, why shall we do that? Is not the world better off without us and without Jesus?

No, it is not. If the world is left to itself without divine and objective grounding principles, it will sink into subjectivism and relativism where each one takes his own thought as truth. Because there would be no reference other than one’s idea, anybody can do anything as long as it suits him. The criminal will have no remorse, the robbers no problem of conscience, the evildoers no shame. In the end, the world will become a chaos, where wrong cannot be distinguished from right.

Our task of transforming the world, however, is not based on humanitarian reasons, as beautiful as they might be, but rather on Jesus’ request. That is why 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 him. In doing so, we show that our faith in Jesus can make a difference in the world and in the people.

Another thing we have to know is that 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 lives 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 also that each one of us has received a particular mission as a mother or a father, a husband or a wife, a religious or a priest, a catechist or a minister of the Church. We have to fulfill that mission according to God’s will. Let us ask the Lord to 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 God bless you all!

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



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