

The Ascension of the Lord A/2017

The readings of this feast of the Ascension talk about the glorification of Our Lord Jesus in heaven. They invite us to celebrate the entry of our Lord in heaven and his sitting at the right hand of the Father. They also invite us to celebrate the beginning of the mission of the Church in response to the recommendation to evangelize the world.

The first reading of the Acts of the Apostles gives an account of the life of Jesus since his teaching until the day he was taken up to heaven. It highlights the event of the resurrection and the reality of Jesus' apparitions to the disciples. It also shows the importance of the Holy Spirit as the fulfillment of the promise made by God. Finally, it describes the occurrence of the Ascension by providing the circumstances through which it happened and the effect it had on the disciples.

What is behind this text is the idea that Jesus was glorified by the Father in his resurrection and in his Ascension to heaven. Another idea is that, though Jesus is in the glory of heaven, he will return in the same way he went to the Father. The last idea is related to the truth that the work of evangelization is a response of faithfulness to the command of Jesus.

This text allows us to understand the importance of today's Gospel as Jesus commissions the disciples to evangelize the world. First of all, the Gospel says that after Jesus' resurrection from the dead, the disciples met him at the mountain where he ordered them to gather. The Gospel says also that at that gathering, he told his disciples that he has received all power in heaven and on earth. After that, the Gospel reports that Jesus sent his disciples to teach and baptize in the name of the Father, the son and the Holy Spirit, until the end of the world.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today, I want to talk about the reality of the Ascension. In fact, we all know what happened in the resurrection of Jesus, namely that Jesus did not stay in the tomb forever. God raised him and gave him to appear to the disciples and be part of their life for awhile.

As accounted, the resurrection means above all that God glorified Jesus in raising him from the dead. Though the Jews put him to death because he declared to be the Son of God, by his resurrection God confirmed him as the savior of the world. Moreover, by raising Jesus from the dead, God certainly let him sit at his right hand and put all things beneath his feet so that he becomes the head of everything that exists in the universe, including the Church, which is his body, as St Paul states in the second reading.

In that sense, we can say that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, he would not have ascended into heaven. That is why the resurrection and the Ascension are two sides of a same coin, which is the glorification of Jesus by the Father. The Ascension of our Lord is the crowning of the mystery of his resurrection. It is the feast of his glorification that has already started with his resurrection from the dead.

What are the consequences to draw from this understanding? First. The fact that Jesus has ascended into heaven does not mean that he has left us alone. Neither is he gone far from us; on the contrary, he is still with us, but in a different way. In fact, before the resurrection, Jesus could only be seen in one place at a time; he could only speak to the people he was with at that time. Now all the limitations of time, space and material

world are removed so that through the power of the Holy Spirit he is perpetually present in the Church and to us until he comes again.

However, the fact that Jesus comes again does not mean that we know the hour and the time he will return. We cannot even speculate about it. In truth, it serves no purpose to know the times or the seasons about the return of Jesus. That is a secret whose key belongs to God alone. What is important, for us, is to be spiritually prepared so that whenever it comes, God might find us ready.

That is a warning to each one of us because people like to predict the end of the world by interpreting the events happening in the world and in nature as we have seen with hurricane Katrina or the Tsunami. The drama of our generation, indeed, is that because we know a lot of things, people do not want to confess their ignorance with regard to the return of Jesus. And yet, there is a huge gap between God's mind and our mind.

Second. If Jesus is perpetually present in the church, it means that we have to work for him in the world. Then, we understand the remark of the angels to the disciples: "Why are you standing here looking at the sky"? The looking up to sky is the attitude of passivity and disinterest to the things of the world. Instead of looking up to heaven, we have to commit ourselves to transforming this world in the name of our faith in Jesus and to make it a better place for the generations to come.

We have to use our religion as a stimulus in order to work at bettering the life of our fellows in the world. In this same way, we have to understand the mission that Jesus gives to the disciples to baptize in the Holy Trinity and to make disciples of all nations.

In that sense, it belongs to the Church to bring the good news of God's kingdom to others, to tell them that God loves them and wants them to be saved in his son Jesus Christ. Moreover, the Church has the duty to baptize in the name of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It means, also, that by our baptism we declare our belonging to the people of God as we manifest publicly our intent to change our life according to the teaching of Jesus, for our eternal salvation.

It is the same mission that is given to each one of us today. As disciples of Jesus, 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 that the Risen Lord may help us preach him to the world with boldness, courage and persistence. May he bless the apostolate of many who give their time to the work of the Church! May God bless you all!

Acts 1: 1-11; Ephesians 1: 17-23; Matthew 28: 16-20



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