

Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord A/2020

Let me start this homily with the words of St Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:14): “If Jesus did not rise from the dead, vain would be our faith”. To these words, I can add this: “Likewise, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, he would not have ascended into heaven”. By combining these two statements I can say that the resurrection of our Lord and his Ascension into heaven are like two sides of a same coin, which is the glorification of our Lord at the right of the Father in heaven.

The Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven is, indeed, the crowning of the paschal times and the beginning of the Church’s journey in response to the recommendation of our Lord Jesus to bring the Good News of salvation to the whole world.

As St Paul claims in the letter to the Ephesians, God has exercised his great might in raising Jesus from the dead. By doing so, he sat him at his right hand in the heavens, far above every principality, authority, power, dominion and name not only of those existing now, but even of those generations to come.

The resurrection and the Ascension are important moments of the mystery of the life of our Lord. By raising Jesus and by letting him throne at his right hand, God has put everything beneath his feet. He has made him the head of everything that exists in the universe, including you and me, and the Church, which is his body.

In order to enter into the celebration of the mystery of the Ascension of our Lord, we have to ask God to give us his spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we come to truly know him. We have to ask him to give us and enlighten the eyes of our hearts so that we come to know the hope of our call, the rich glory of our inheritance and the greatness of his power that is beyond everything. Then, we can understand that Christ who has ascended into heaven is always with us now, in the present age and in the present moment where we are beaten down by the Corona virus.

What we have today in the Acts of the Apostles is the description of the life of Jesus from his beginning, his death and his resurrection to the Ascension in heaven. The point of Luke by writing this portion of history is to show us that Jesus is truly a historic person who, though he was the son of God, lived in this world, suffered, died, rose and eventually went back to his Father in heaven.

Two important moments cross the narrative Luke gives on the life of our lord Jesus, namely the promise of the Holy Spirit and his consequence for the work of the Church. There is also the reality of the Ascension and its parallel in the second coming of Jesus.

First of all, Jesus recommends the apostles to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. This recommendation is very important, because the Holy Spirit is not only the counselor who will help the disciples walk in the ways of Jesus, but he is also the fulfillment of the promise of the ever presence of Jesus until the end of time. The Holy Spirit makes us the disciples of Jesus and members of his body, which is the Church. He gives us courage to bear witnesses to Jesus and give testimony about him all over the world.

Second, Jesus warns the apostles about the speculation over the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. The restoration of Israel is the symbol of the restoration of the kingdom of God. For our Lord, it serves no purpose to know the time and the season that

the Father has established by his own authority when his kingdom will be restored. That is a secret and a mystery that belongs to him alone.

In that perspective, what we have to do is to keep vigil and be ready so that anytime our Lord returns we might not be taken by surprise. This warning is ever present even today. How many people in the history of mankind have always tried to violate the secret of God by pretending to predict the end of the world and the return of Jesus? Is not that a sign that we, human beings, are not respectful of the distance between God and us?

And yet, as human beings, we are ignorant of so many things that are in the mind and the nature of God. The drama of our generation is that we just do not want to confess that ignorance. We want to always pretend that we know even when we do not know anything. It is as though by doing so we will become smart. The truth, however, is that we cannot become smart just because we pretend to know. God is God and we remain human beings.

In the description of the Ascension, the words of the angels to the Galileans who were looking at Jesus when he was ascending are very striking: "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky"? These words are not congratulation to them, but a reproach. Why such a reproach? What the angels would like to say with this reproach is that Jesus is not to be looked for in the sky. Rather, we have to find him in our commitments in society and in the activities of daily life. Helped by his word, we have to transform the world and make it a viable place for each one of God's children. As long as we live, we have to be active in transforming the world through the power of Jesus.

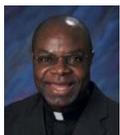
This reproach clarifies also the meaning of Ascension. In fact, the Ascension does not mean that Jesus is now hidden in the clouds of heaven, far from us. It means only that our Lord is not submitted anymore to the limitations of time, space and the material world. In the same way, heaven does not mean some place beyond the sky, but rather a state of blessedness where we will be with our Lord forever.

It is only in that spirit that we can understand the mission Jesus gives to the apostles in today's Gospel to go making disciples of all the nations, teaching them and baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

That mission has to be continued today by the work of the Church. That is our mission as disciples of Jesus. We have to make Jesus present in the world and bring him to others until the end of the world. 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 together that the Risen Lord may without ceasing help us preach him to the world with boldness, courage and persistence. May he bless the apostolate of the Church and our leaders! May God bless you all!

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



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