

Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord B2021

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 the point of 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 can we say about the feast of the Ascension? Today I want to talk to you about the reality of heaven where our Lord has ascended at the right of the Father?

Let me start very simply with a question: what is "heaven"? For almost all people, heaven is the dwelling place of God. When in the song of "Gloria" we chant: "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men" (Lk 2: 14), we say exactly the same thing. The bible says also that a chariot of fire came down and took the prophet Elijah to heaven (2 Kings 2: 11). Given such a description, we easily identify heaven with the sky.

For modern man, heaven is the space in which our planet moves and the whole solar system is situated. That is why when there is a launching of a rocket in space, everybody is looking to the sky. Now, when we say that Jesus has ascended into heaven, what do we mean by that? We need to clarify this concept lest people continue to identify heaven with the sky.

First of all, God is the creator of everything that exists in the world, including heaven and earth. If that is true, it means, then, that God is beyond heaven and earth because he cannot be closed up in things he has created. I still remember what I learned in what you call the catechism of Baltimore: Where is God? "God "is in heaven, on earth and everywhere,".

Second, when we say, like in “the Lord’s Prayer” that God is in heaven, we mean that that he "dwells in inaccessible light" (1Timothy 1:16), that he is as far from us "as the heavens are above the earth" (103: 11). In other words, God is outside of space and time and so is his paradise. Heaven, in that sense is more a state than a place. It is a place of rest and eternal recompense of the good where the elects will be eternally with Jesus.

In the light of all this, what does it mean to proclaim that Jesus "went up to heaven"? We find the answer in the Creed. "He went up to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father." That Christ went up to heaven means that "he is seated at the right hand of the Father". It means also that as a man he has entered God's world, where he has been constituted Lord and head of everything that exists in the world.

However, although Jesus went up to heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father, he is still with us; he has not left us on earth. He has only gone out of our visual world. He himself assures us: "Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Therefore, Jesus did not ascend to an already existing heaven that awaited him, but he went to form and inaugurate heaven for us. As he says in John 14: 2-3: "I am going to prepare a place for you ... so that where I am you may be also".

Because Jesus is with his Father in heaven without ceasing to be present with us, he has given us a mission to make disciples of all the earth. That mission is the reason why the church exists. At the beginning, that mission was given to the apostles. Today, it is given to us, that is the Church. That makes us heirs of the heritage received from Christ.

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 4: 1-13; Mark 16: 15-20



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