

## **Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord A2023**

Today we celebrate the Ascension of our Lord into heaven. The Ascension is the crowning of the paschal mysteries, for if God raised our Lord from the dead, it was so that he sits at his right hand in heaven. Like the two sides of a same coin, the Resurrection and the Ascension are the celebration of the same mystery of the glorification of our Lord at the right hand of the Father. The Ascension is the beginning of the Church's journey and mission in a response to the recommendation of our Lord to bring the Good News of salvation to the whole world.

The witness of St Paul as found in the Letter to the Ephesians combines in a single movement the resurrection and the Ascension of our Lord. As St Paul says, God has exercised his great might in raising Jesus from the dead. 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. He put everything beneath his feet and gave him as head over everything that exists in the universe, including the Church, which is his body.

The mystery of the Ascension of our Lord is not an event we can comprehend intellectually, but in faith. That is why St Paul appeals to us to ask the Father of our Lord Jesus to give us his Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we come to truly know him. That way, the eyes of our hearts will be enlightened 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 will understand that Christ who has ascended into heaven is always with us now, and will come again at the end of the ages.

The witness we find in the Acts Apostles put a period of forty days between the resurrection of our Lord and his Ascension into heaven. This period of forty days is like a time of initiation where our Lord was preparing his disciples to the reality of the mission he was about to leave to them before ascending to his Father. During those days, the Lord prepared also the disciples to the reception of the Holy Spirit and consolidated the sacraments already instituted, like in the case of the disciples of Emmaus who recognized him through the breaking of the bread.

The event of the Ascension as Luke recalls it, starts with an account of the life of our Lord from his beginning, his death and his resurrection. Our Lord's promise of the Holy Spirit aims at making the disciples the witnesses who will stand for the truth of the Gospel and give testimony about him throughout the world, starting from Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. The presence of the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of the ever presence of our Lord until the end of time.

The Ascension into heaven does not mean that our Lord has left us alone. He is not gone far from us. He is still with us, but in a different way. Before the resurrection, our Lord could only be seen in one place at a time. He could only speak to the people who were with him 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 our Lord 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 our Lord. That is a secret whose key of knowledge is in the hands of the Father. What is important, for us, is to be spiritually prepared so that whenever the day comes, our Lord might find us ready. As our Lord says in the Acts, “It is not for you to know the time or the seasons that the Father has established by his own authority.”

This 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. The drama of our generation is that because we know a lot of things, people do not want to confess their ignorance with regard to the return of our Lord. And yet, there is a huge gap between God’s mind and our mind.

For sure, our Lord is ascended into heaven, but we, who remained on earth, have the duty to transform the world in his name. Then, we understand the remark of the angels to the disciples: “Why are you standing here looking at the sky”? Our Lord is not to be found in the sky. We have to find him here in our multiple commitments in the world and in the ordinary activities of life. The looking up to sky is the attitude of passivity and disinterest toward 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.

That explains the mission our Lord has left us and the whole Church: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”.

We have the mission of bringing 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. The Church has the duty to baptize in the name of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and not in the name of something or someone else. By our baptism we declare our belonging to the people of God as we manifest publicly our intent to convert and change our lives according to the teaching of Jesus, for our eternal salvation.

The mission that was given to the disciples is given to us today. As Jesus was sent by the Father to bring the message of salvation to the world, he entrusts that proclamation to us. We have to make Christ present in the world and to others, each one according to his vocation. We have to continue the work of evangelization in the world so that people may come to know Jesus and receive their salvation. It is up to us, then, to make the Church grow and the word of Jesus bear lasting fruits in the lives of those who welcome him. Blessings to all of you!

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



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