

## The Ascension of the Lord

May 16, 2021

Isn't it odd, when you think about it? When we celebrate with feast days certain events in the life of our Lord – like Christmas, Good Friday and Easter – we have particular thoughts and feelings that well up within us about them. But when it comes to the Ascension of our Lord, if I may dare to speak for others, it kind of leaves us a bit flat! Why is that?

I think in part it is because we don't know how to relate to it? Here are a few thoughts that may help.

When we love someone, we share in their joys and sorrows. We laugh with them and we cry with them. We are happy about their successes and sad about their failures. Our love of Jesus makes us rejoice at His birth on Christmas. On Good Friday we are filled with sorrow over His passion and death. On Easter Sunday we rejoice in His resurrection. But our joy or sorrow in each of these events is as much for ourselves as for Him. In what He has done *for us* by His birth, death and resurrection.

With the Ascension it is different. I think our sentiments are first more for Him than for us. We are called to share in His joy at His triumphant return to His Father (Jn 14:28). The heavenly glory of which He emptied Himself when He humbled Himself to become like one of us (Phil 2:6-11) is now restored.

We rejoice that His crown of thorns has been replaced with a crown of glory; that the mocking crowds at Golgotha have been replaced with myriads of adoring angels.

But the Feast of the Ascension is also about us. Jesus has gone ahead of us to prepare a place for us. *“In My Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, so that where I am, there you may be also”* (Jn. 14:1-3).

It reminds us that death does not end our lives. It transforms them. We leave this temporary realm to enter the eternal. We think of this world as our home, and it is, but only for a season. Our true home is with God (Phil. 3:20). And in His Ascension Christ has gone ahead of us to Heaven to prepare for our arrival.

Thoughts of our own death, or the reality of the death of a loved one, naturally fill us with fear or grief. But Christ has given us supernatural hope. By His resurrection and Ascension He has conquered death and opened the gates of Heaven for us (see 2 Peter 1:11).

And this brings up a further significance to His Ascension. At the incarnation the Son of God took upon Himself a human nature that He received through the Blessed Virgin Mary. But He does not abandon that human nature upon His return to His Father. He takes it with Him. The body with which Christ preached and worked miracles until exhausted, the body with which He ate and slept and journeyed, the

body with which He drew followers to Himself, the body with which He suffered, died and rose, He takes with Him. Why is that important?

Because that human body now shares in His glory. The Son of God has retained His human nature making it possible *for us* to share in His glory also. He participated in our nature so that we might participate in His! *“For you ... have received a spirit of adoption.... we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him”* (Rm. 8:15-17)

In the meantime, while we are here, we prepare ourselves, make ourselves presentable, as those who are privileged to be invited to the wedding banquet of the Lord (see Mt. 22:1-14).

But for us to endure until that blessed moment, we need God’s help. And that is another reason why we ought to rejoice in Christ’s Ascension. He takes His place at the right hand of the Father where He continually intercedes on our behalf. He pleads on our behalf! *“Consequently He is able for all time to save those who approach God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them”* (Heb. 7:25).

Finally, Christ Ascended so that the Holy Spirit might descend upon His Church. As He told His apostles, *“It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you”* (Jn 16:7). But that is a homily for another day. God bless.