

Homily - Ascension of the Lord C

We celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord Jesus into heaven when Jesus was taken up into his glory. He now sits at the right-hand of the Father and shares the glory he had with the Father before the world was made (cf. John 17:5). St. Paul puts it beautifully in this way, “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:9-11).

In heaven, Jesus exercises his priesthood for all time; all our liturgical celebrations (the Mass, Sacraments, etc) are channeled to the Heavenly Father through him. The power of his mediation is completely guaranteed. If you need something from the White House, somebody that works in Wal-Mart may not be able to help; but somebody in President’s cabinet could easily help. Now Jesus occupies his exalted position at the right-hand of the Father. Would it be impossible to fulfill what he promised? Not at all! He promised, “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32). Whoever will be saved will be saved through the grace and mercy of Christ, irrespective of the religion practiced. According to St. Augustine, “The God-Christ is the home where we are going; the man-Christ is the way by which we are going. We go to him, we go by Him; why then do we fear that we should go astray?”

That Jesus ascended into heaven with his risen and glorified human body implies that his humanity now participates “in God’s power and authority” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 668). What an awesome reality! Just imagine if someone you have met or used to know – who visited your neighborhood or perhaps, even ate dinner with your family – now travelled into outer space. Imagine a scenario where you see the spacecraft on television making a touchdown on Jupiter or Mars. How would you feel? Would it not be more exciting if it is someone you have met? How much more than Jesus Christ, that lived in our world, preached in our streets, ate our food and drank our water, now ascended into the metaphysical realm of heaven. What a marvel! I can say, “I know him”, “I belong to his Church”, “and I eat his body and drink his blood.” Imagine that our earthly sand attached to his feet, our earthly wind in contact with him, and even the fingerprints of the apostles that touched may have gone up into heaven with him? In fact, the Catechism teaches, “In him human history and indeed all creation are ‘set forth’ and transcendently fulfilled” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 668).

Jesus ascended into heaven after forty days of “giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles” and “speaking about the kingdom of God.” Thus, the ascension marked the completion of the studies of the apostles. Christ taught them the Paschal Mystery: the mystery of the suffering, death, resurrection and ascension. Simply put, he revealed the Luminous, the Sorrowful and the Glorious Mysteries. The apostles graduated from the school of Jesus, the best University of Theology that will ever be; simply the only one of its kind. Jesus certified them above any earthly school of Theology in these words: “No longer do I call you servants ... I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15). Thus, the “degree” and “diploma” they received can only be awarded by the Holy Trinity. No university that has ever existed, or may exist, can ever achieve what “Jesus did and taught [the apostles] until the day he was taken up.”

From the earlier expression of St. Luke concerning what Jesus “did” and “taught”, we see the authenticity of the following teaching of the Church: “This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words” (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 2). Hence, in any teaching of the Church (especially where the world “protests” against it), instead of listening to the world and public opinion, we must ask, “What did Jesus and the apostles teach?” “What did Jesus and the apostles do? That is the Key to unlocking the Truth! For their unique role as eyewitnesses and their intimate relationship with Jesus, the Church teaches that divine revelation ended with the death of the last apostle. “We now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 4).

Finally, Jesus “enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for “the promise of the Father.... In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit further helped the apostles understand the totality of what Jesus revealed. “The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26). This same Holy Spirit will come mightily at Pentecost. Let us therefore respond to the Parish Pentecost Retreat this week and prepare ourselves for the anointing from on high through Christ our Lord. Amen.