

The Ascension of Our Lord (B - 5/13/2010 — *Ascending with Christ*)

In Name of the Risen and Ascended Lord JESUS CHRIST. [Amen]

The absence of our Lord's visible presence can be disconcerting – and was perhaps so at first for the Disciples who witnessed *The Ascension of Our Lord* on that Thursday long ago ... 40 days after His resurrection. But we must learn that Christ did this for a blessed purpose – namely, that our faith in Him might have more abundant exercise. As the Lord said to Thomas: *blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed* [JN 20.29]. *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also* [LK 12.34]. Since Christ – our priceless Treasure – has ascended to heaven, let us set our affections on heavenly things and meditate on things that are above [COL 3.2].

Our Lord has not left us as orphans ... without hope – but rather as a bride who eagerly awaits her Groom's arrival to escort her and the bridesmaids to the eternal Marriage Feast. Therefore, we wait confidently for our Savior's return from on high – His *coming in the clouds with great power and glory* [MK 13.26]. Meanwhile we partake of the foretaste of that heavenly Feast of the Lamb, receiving Christ Who even now comes to us in His Body and Blood in His *Holy Supper*. By God's grace, let us firmly believe that our bodies – nourished with this heavenly food – shall one day rise from death and that we also shall ascend into heaven to be with our Lord. For what we now know only by faith and see only as *in a mirror dimly* [1COR 13.12], we then shall see with our eyes and in great clarity; what we now hope for in the certainty of faith in Christ's promises, we then shall enjoy in joyful, blessed fulfillment.

Yet, we must follow our heavenly Bridegroom not only in ardent desires, but also in good works – for *nothing unclean will ever enter* the heavenly Holy City [REV 21.27]. Therefore, two angels appeared at Christ's *Ascension* [ACTS 1.10] ... coming from the heavenly Jerusalem clothed in white apparel – symbols of innocence and purity. Pride cannot ascend to heaven with the great Master of humility; nor evil with the Author of all goodness; nor discord with the Prince of peace; nor lust and wantonness with the Son of the Virgin; nor vice with the Parent of all virtue; nor sin with the Holy One; nor our sinful

infirmities with the Great Physician. Do you desire to behold God in the future life? Live worthily in the sight of God in this life. Do you hope for the blessedness of heaven in the age to come? Love not the world in this age.

O blessed Lord Jesus, draw our hearts after You! Cleanse us from our great many sins with Your holy Blood. Let Your glorified, immortal Body dwell within our weak human flesh – that You might strengthen us and cause us to abide in Your forgiveness, remain in Your salvation, live in Your life. As we journey here, pilgrims upon this earth, make us to know that You are indeed present with us ... though in another and invisible form [LK 24.15] – until we see You as You are in our heavenly home above [1JN 3.2].

Now our Savior chose to ascend to heaven from the Mount of Olives at Bethany [ACTS 1.12] – for the olive branch is the emblem of peace and joy. It was, therefore, fitting that He Who through His bitter Passion brings peace to terrified and troubled consciences – but is now received with most jubilant joy by the heavenly hosts – should ascend from this Mount of Olives ... this hill of peace (as it were). That sacred mount calls us to heavenly things – let us follow on with holy desires, since we may not yet follow with bodily feet.

Moses in like manner went up into a mountain to speak with the Lord [EXO 19.3]; in a mountain the holy patriarchs worshipped the Lord [JN 4.20]; Abraham chose the mountain district, while Lot chose Jordan's plain [GEN 13.11]. Let the faithful soul forsake the low-lying plains of this world, and seek with holy devotion those heavenly heights; for then you shall enjoy the most blessed communion with God ... then you shall be able to worship God in spirit and in truth [JN 4.24], then you shall (with faithful Abraham) escape the eternal burnings that shall overtake the plains of worldliness.

Bethany signifies the *house of humility and affliction* – through which the way to the heavenly kingdom lies open to us, just as Christ through His most severe sufferings entered into His glory [LK 24.56]. Until this point in our Savior's life and work, heaven seemed to be closed to our souls, and the Paradise above guarded with a flaming sword [GEN 3.24]; but now our triumphant Lord throws wide open the gates of heaven to us, that He may lead

us back to our heavenly home, from which we had been excluded on account of our sins (even as Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden). The enraptured disciples stand gazing up into heaven [ACTS 1.11]; so let all true disciples of the Christ contemplate things heavenly and divine.

O blessed Lord Jesus, how gloriously Your Passion has ended! What a blessed and sudden transformation is here! In what awful anguish did we see You upon Mount Calvary, and now in what glory we behold You upon Mount Olivet! There You suffered alone; here You are attended by a vast multitude of the angelic hosts. There You ascended the Cross; here You ascend in a cloud to heaven. There You were crucified between two thieves; here You are lifted up among angelic choirs. There You were nailed to the Cross as a condemned criminal; here, free from all condemnation, You are the Deliverer of us who otherwise would be justly condemned to eternal death. There You bled and died in agony; here You rejoice and triumph in glory.

Christ is our glorious Head ... we are the members of His Body. Rejoice, therefore, and shout for joy, O faithful soul, in the Ascension to heaven of your Head. The glory of the Head is the glory also of His members. Where in Christ our human flesh reigns, there let us believe that we too shall reign as kings under our great King. Where in Christ our human Blood rules, there let us with certainty hope that we too shall be glorious. Though our sins would forbid such things, yet our God-given participation in Jesus' holy nature makes them possible. Where the Head is, there shall also the other members of the Body be. Christ, our Head, has gone into the heavens, therefore we – the members of the Body – with good reason faithfully hope to enter heaven ... and not only so, but even now we already have a possession in heaven.

Our Lord Jesus Christ came from heaven for our redemption; He returns there for our glorification. He was born in the flesh **for us**, He suffered in the flesh **for us**, He died in the flesh **for us**, He was raised in the flesh **for us** – therefore also He ascended in His flesh **for us**. The Passion of Christ wins our love – the Resurrection of Christ strengthens our faith – the Ascension of Christ confirms our hope that we shall dwell in heaven before God ... forever.

In the Name of FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]

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