

Ascension Day 13 May 2021

The Ascension of Jesus

In today's readings, we can see how the disciples' relationship with Jesus is changing. During his earthly life, his disciples had many ideas about Jesus and numerous expectations about what He should do for them. As good Jews, they dreamed of Israel's liberation and prosperity. As ordinary people, they wanted everyday happiness for themselves.

His death buried those hopes. The apostles felt disappointed. But then there was a resurrection. This event raised their expectations again. For this reason, in today's reading from Acts, we can find the disciples' question: "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Ascension changes everything about the way they think about Jesus. I believe that at this point, Jesus' disciples finally understood that Jesus is not the Messiah of their dreams, who will renew the political existence of Israel or fulfil their visions of happiness. At that time, when they finally abandoned their concepts of who Jesus is or should be, they were able to recognise in Him the Son of God whose mission is to save the whole world.

On the day of Ascension, the disciples fully understood the message of the Son of God about salvation, about the Comforter, and finally about returning to the Father. The Teacher kept his promises for three years. On the day of the Lord's departure, everything fell into place for them. The last doubts that Jesus is the Son of God were removed, and therefore the disciples "worshipped him" (Matthew 28:9). On the day of Ascension, the disciples also rediscovered the meaning of their lives. Jesus left them a very clear testament - they are to go out into the world to make disciples of all nations, baptise, and teach to obey all that Jesus has commanded them (Matthew 28:19).

Jesus said to the Apostles: "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

First, Jesus said: in Jerusalem, in all Judea. This command was understandable to the Apostles. But what does that mean for us? Our Jerusalem and Judea are our family home, our local community, both parish and residence. We are to be witnesses of Christ there.

Where else? Second: in Samaria. Of course, the Apostles understood that they were to bear witness to those who do not believe in one God. It's the same with our Samaria. We are to testify of Jesus among those who do not know God, unbelievers.

Third: to the ends of the earth. Just as the Apostles went to proclaim Jesus everywhere: Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, and many other places, we too should have this missionary enthusiasm to speak about Jesus wherever we go, wherever we find ourselves.

We are to preach the Gospel, we are to teach that Jesus did not fly into space during the Ascension, but in this act, he raised our human nature to the level of God. So, it is not about a journey in outer space but about crossing our temporal dimension.

The risen Jesus still has his wounds. Karl Barth, 20th century Swiss Reformed theologian, said that Christ maintains his humanity "to all eternity ... It is a clothing which He does not put off. It is His temple which He does not leave. It is the form which He does not lose" (Church Dogmatics, Vol. 4, pp. 100-01). By ascending to the Father, with his human body marked with pain and suffering, marked with wounds, Jesus made a divinisation of our humanity. He did not abandon us, but he brought us back to life. Jesus has brought us back into the mysteries of the life of the Triune God.

Therefore, the Ascension of Jesus is not only Christ's triumph and the revelation of His divinity but also our victory. Ascension is an affirmation of the sanctity of our human nature. Leo the Great, Bishop of Rome in the fifth century, wrote in Sermon 74 (On the Lord's Ascension, II.): "As the Lord's Resurrection was the cause of our rejoicing; so the subject of our present gladness is His Ascension, as we commemorate and duly venerate that day on which the Nature of our humility in Christ was raised above all the host of heaven, overall the ranks of angels, beyond the height of all powers, to sit with God the Father."

Today theologians affirm that one of the most significant transgressions against God is man's humiliation, disfigurement, and murder. In recent times, the passion of Christ has taken place in the recruitment of black or any other slaves, in the Holocaust, in Auschwitz, in the Gulags, in the torture of many innocent people, in every war conflict in which people suffer and die. For those bodies that have been burned in crematoria, bombarded, raped, humiliated - have eternal beauty and life in God's eyes.

So, our participation in the saving work of Christ also consists in restoring to other people and us the dignity of human life and the dignity of human body. Since Christ himself did not reject the human body, since Christ returned to the Father in the human body, He also enriched the Trinity with the human body. And he showed that our body is destined to be in heaven forever!