

Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord

May 16-17, 2015

*He put all things beneath his feet*

Readings: Acts 1: 1-11; Ephesians 1: 17-23; Mark 16: 15-20

The familiar cry of many soon-to-graduate high school and college seniors each May may be summarized with the sentiment- “I cannot wait to get out of here and onto the next phase of my life.” Many of us looking back can recall that same longing for a world that seemed limitless and filled with possibility. We remember.

Contrast this with our second reading in which Saint Paul reminds us that Christ has “put all things beneath his feet.” The obvious first impression from this phrase is clearly one of subjection and confinement. Even in common speech, we speak of parents keeping their children “under their thumbs”, bosses “holding their employees feet to the fire,” and “keeping tabs” on people so that we know where they are going. But in his Letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul positions Jesus Christ as Head of the Church, using the beautiful image of the Church as the Body of Christ.

This is more than an image; it is a view of the world, called teleological, meaning that in the world, things relate to each other. Each order of things has a place and a purpose, and yes, mankind is at the top of the hierarchy, under Christ of course, but still at the top of creation.

As the political philosopher Fr. James Schall has written: “Today, the world is not understood to be “for” man, but man is “for” the world. This deliberate reversal of the hierarchy of ends within the natural order means that the chief interest of man is not his own soul. It is rather the presumed carrying capacity of the earth, and perhaps the cosmos itself.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James Schall, S.J., “On Natural Resources,” Jan. 6, 2015, cf. [thecatholicthing.org](http://thecatholicthing.org)

St. Paul says the Church carries “the fullness” of Christ, who himself fills all things in every way. When we come into Church, we are coming into the presence of the fullness of Jesus Christ. He fulfills our deepest desires for meaning in life, but he does so as head of the Church, reminding us that our fullness of life ought to be lived in the midst of the Church, of which we are members.

In Ephesians, the word “church” is used in a universal sense, and includes all believers. Obviously, in the beginning, the Jerusalem Church was the universal Church, before it began to spread. The gathering of the Church occurs in the name of Jesus Christ. As the community of believers, the Church is the assembly (*ekklesia*) of all who believe in Jesus Christ.

The Solemnity of the Ascension highlights that even while Jesus has gone back to the Father in heaven, nevertheless he remains head of the Church, for the Church is the Body of Christ. He is not absent from us. “While in heaven he is also with us; and we while on earth are with him. He is here with us by his divinity, his power and his love. We cannot be in heaven, as he is on earth, by divinity, but in him, we can be there by love.”<sup>2</sup>

It also serves as a call for our own future. Where Christ reigns in heaven, He invites us to join the Church triumphant, those countless souls who have persevered in God’s grace and now sing psalms, hymns and inspired songs to God. Saint Augustine once commented on this feast by drawing the distinction between promise and fulfillment. What has been promised to us, has not yet been fulfilled in our bodies: “Christ is now exalted above the heavens, but he still suffers on earth all the pain that we, the members of his body, have to bear.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> cf. Augustine, *Sermo de Ascensione Domini*, Mai 98, 1-7: PLS 2, 429-495

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

The Lord does not keep all things under His feet in order to stifle us, but that we might discover our true freedom as members of the Body, each according to our own role, while at the same time, Christ protects the Church by subjugating evil.

Despite its power, evil can and never will ultimately triumph in the Church. If we stay united to Christ, neither will evil triumph in our lives. “God mounts his throne to shouts of joy; a blare of trumpets for the Lord.” Let us eagerly go forth in joy and gladness, ready to meet Him.