

Feast of the Ascension Year “C”

May 7-8, 2016

Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23; Luke 24:46-53

Quite rightly, when discussing the Solemnity of the Ascension, much has been made in the history of the Church of its significance as a feast of Christ’s final triumph, assuming His rightful place at the right hand of the Father. In the earliest existing homily about the Ascension dated in 388 A.D., St. Gregory of Nyssa described for us the solemn procession of Christ into heaven.

Gregory makes the point—Christ was **not** attired in festive mantle for a coronation, but in the simple garb of His glorified humanity. He goes on to describe the garment of Christ bespattered with blood from the winepress of human suffering, his hands and feet covered with the marks of his passion, so that the watchmen would not open the door. “Who is this King of Glory?” And the angels responded, “The Lord of Hosts, he is the King of Glory.” Finally, amidst trumpet blast, the Cherubim and Seraphim opened the portals, and placed the crown of the kingdom on His brow.

What is particularly interesting about Gregory’s description is even the consideration that the Cherubim and Seraphim might not have recognized Jesus when he came to the heavenly gates. There are no elaborate farewells in these accounts. In reflecting on this, it forces us to ponder why such an approach was taken. True, we are told that they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. But for how long?

Could it have had something to do with the reality that for the apostles, this was a time of farewell mixed with sadness, perhaps even a sense of abandonment? I can almost picture them feigning joy that Jesus was going to the Father, because now, who would guide them? Despite his preparation, it had to be a total shock to their collective mindset. What now? Why must you leave us?

May Saint Gregory's image of the man clothed in the simple garb of His glorified humanity guide our reflection today. Our Lord experienced death in its entirety, in its forsakenness, the ultimate surrender of himself to the will of the Father.

Looking at the world today, we too may wonder if we have been forsaken and abandoned. More and more, the Christian Faith appears to be on the wane, if one believes the reports of the secular media. In some respects, it is undeniably true. However, if Christ did not precede us to heaven, how can He show us the way? He promised to send the Holy Spirit. Today's reflection is in that difficult in-between time, before the Holy Spirit. Their reaction is understandable, but is ours, with the benefit of Pentecost?

Catholics remain a minority in the world, of this there is no doubt. We are many in number, spread out in every nation and every tongue, yet still a minority. We must however, be a creative minority, not bowing to the pressure to privatize our Faith. Despite many challenges presented by this rapid secularization, we have the light of Truth to offer to the world, to any and all whom will listen.

Our second reading reminded us: "May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call." Our lives bear witness to this hope, and we have many opportunities to bear witness to this in simple, daily activities. Just yesterday, I was with approximately 1000 people at the Abria Life Care Center Fun Run. They are doing amazing work with women in need, visibly witnessing to the sanctity of human life by their willingness to assist young women.

While we may have many reasons to lament society, we will be more successful by highlighting signs of hope, in a world desperate for it. This Friday is a long awaited day of joy and hope for all in this

Archdiocese on the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima, with the installation of Archbishop Hebda. I ask for your fervent prayers in these final days of preparation. It is a new beginning.

Still, our ascension to the Father will not take place before we undergo our own crucible of suffering, in whatever form it may come to us. By experiencing life's little deaths and disappointments, and bearing them in faith, we shall ultimately learn how to let go once and for all. We will bear our trials lovingly, seeing each day as an opportunity to do something beautiful for God. Our Savior has not abandoned us; Christ is with His Church.

Today, we celebrate for the Lord his own triumph in heaven, his kingship yet received in utter humility. But this must not remain merely a feast about Jesus, as much as an invitation for us. He is just far enough away that the longing of our heart's is kept alive, and just so near that this longing for heaven in each of us spurs us on to even greater works of charity. As we carry a part of heaven in our hearts, let us bring heaven to the hearts of our fellow pilgrims on earth.