

Ascension Sunday, 28 May 2017

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up to heaven? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven shall come in the same way as you have seen Him going up to heaven.” Acts 1:11

As we celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension on this Sunday instead of Thursday (as prescribed by Bishops of the UK), we must raise our thoughts to heaven where Our Lord Jesus has ascended. Pope St. Leo the Great said: **“Christ’s Ascension is our ascension; our body has the hope of one day being where its glorious Head has preceded it.”** This is what Jesus said on the night before He died: *“I go to prepare a place for you, and if I shall go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself; that where I am you also may be.”* Jn. 14: 23. According to Fr. Gabriel, OCD in his book of meditations, *Divine Intimacy*, **“The Ascension is then, a feast of joyful hope, a sweet foretaste of heaven. By going before us, Jesus our Head has given us the right to follow Him there some day, and we can even say with St. Leo, ‘In the person of Christ, we have penetrated the heights of heaven.’ (Roman Breviary) As in Christ Crucified, we die to sin; as in the Risen Christ, we rise to the life of grace, so too, we are raised up to heaven in the Ascension of Christ. This vital participation in Christ’s mysteries is the essential consequence of our incorporation in Him. He is our Head; we, as His members, are totally dependent upon him and intimately bound to His destiny. ‘God, who is rich in mercy,’ says St. Paul, ‘for His exceeding charity wherewith He loved us...hath quickened us together in Christ... and hast raised us up... and hath made us sit together in the heavenly place through Christ Jesus.’ Eph. 2:4-6 Our right to heaven has been given us, our place is ready; it is for us to live in such a way that we may occupy it someday.”** Fr. Gabriel, *“Divine Intimacy,”* p. 535

“...ascending on high, He hath led captivity captive.” Ps. 67:19

In today’s Mass, the Alleluia verses give us a powerful prophecy of the Messiah leading souls into heaven: **“Alleluia. The Lord is in Sinai, in the holy place; ascending on high, He hath led captivity captive.”** Ps. 67:19 This image of captives being led into the city of their conquerors was common in Rome when victorious generals would lead their conquests, as their trophies, into the

imperial city. So, too, Jesus will lead those whom He has redeemed into heaven as Dom Prosper Gueranger in *The Liturgical Year, Vol.9* explains: **“The two Alleluia-versicles give us the words of the royal psalmist, wherein he celebrates the glorious Ascension of the future Messiah, the acclamation of the angels, the loud music of heaven’s trumpets, the gorgeous pageant of the countless fortunate captives of limbo whom the conqueror leads up, as His trophy, to heaven.”** Gueranger, p. 179. How blessed shall we be who are led into heaven as trophies of Christ’s glorious redemption.

“Sweet Sorrow of Christ’s Ascension”

Although Jesus’ Ascension into Heaven has an element of sorrow, Jesus told us that our **“sorrow will be turned to joy.”** (Jn. 16:20) We can see this especially if we look at Jesus’ Ascension through the eyes of His beloved Mother Mary. The disciples of Jesus used to wonder which of the two sentiments, sadness or joy, had priority in Our Lady’s heart when Jesus ascended into heaven. Dom Prosper Gueranger comments on this question: **“They (disciples) used to ask themselves, which of the two sentiments was uppermost in her maternal heart, --sadness, that she was to see her Jesus no more, or joy, that He was now going to enter into the glory He so infinitely deserved. The answer was soon found: had not Jesus said to His disciples: ‘If ye loved Me, ye would indeed be glad, because I go to the Father’; Jn. 14:28 Now, who loved Jesus as Mary did? The Mother’s heart, then, was full of joy at parting with Him. How was she to think of herself, when there was question of the triumph of her Son and her God? Could she that had witnessed the scene of Calvary, do less than desire to see Him glorified, whom she knew to be the sovereign Lord of all things, -- Him whom, but a short time ago, she had seen rejected by His people, blasphemed, and dying the most ignominious and cruel of deaths?”** Gueranger, p. 170

“Sorrow to turn to joy!”

“Amen, Amen I say to you that your shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and you shall be sorrowful but your sorrow shall be turned to joy.” Jn. 16:20

But before our sorrow turns to joy in heaven with Jesus’ return, the angels remind the disciples that they must not stand idle. They are to return to Jerusalem and await the Holy Spirit. Then the

disciples are instructed to go into the whole world and baptize all in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: *“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days, even to consummation of the world.”* Mt. 28:19-20 Jesus gave His disciples this commission just before He ascended into heaven. Dom Gueranger tells us that the disciples were still caught up in the moment of Jesus’ Ascension: **“The disciples are still steadfastly looking up to towards heaven, when lo! two angels, clad in white robes, appear to them saying: ‘Ye men of Galilee! Why stand ye looking up to heaven? This Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come as ye have seen Him going into heaven!’ Acts 1:10-11**

Joy and Triumph in the Ascension

Dom Gueranger again reminds us of the meaning of Jesus’ Ascension: **“He has ascended, a Saviour; He is to return a Judge: between these two events is comprised the whole life of the Church on earth. We are therefore living under the reign of Jesus as our Saviour, for He has said: ‘God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved by Him:’ (Jn. 3:17) and to carry out this merciful design He has been giving to His disciples the mission to go throughout the whole world, and invite men, while yet there is time, to accept the mystery of salvation. They love Jesus; they rejoice at the thought of His having entered into His rest. ‘They went back into Jerusalem with great joy.’ Lk. 24:52 These few simple words of the Gospel indicate the spirit of this admirable feast of the Ascension: it is a festival which, not withstanding its soft tinge of sadness, is, more than any other expressive of joy and triumph.”** Gueranger, p. 173-4

The Need for Prayer

Our Holy Father, St. John Paul II spoke of the absolute need of prayer in our lives if we wish to gain eternal salvation: **“...we must pray too because we are fragile and culpable. We need to admit humbly and truly that we are poor creatures, with confused ideas...We are fragile and weak, and in constant need of interior strength and consolation. Prayer gives us strength for great ideals, for keeping up our**

faith, charity, purity, generosity; prayer gives us strength to rise up from indifference and guilt, if we have had the misfortune to give in to temptation and weakness. Prayer gives light by which to see and to judge from God’s perspective and from eternity. That is why you must not give up praying! Don’t let a day go by without praying a little! Prayer is a duty, but it is also a joy because it is a dialogue with God through Jesus Christ.” (Servant of God, Pope John Paul II, *Audience with Young People*, 14 March 1979.) If we want to save our souls, then we must pray for the graces that we need. This is why Our Lady told the three children at Fatima: **“Pray and sacrifice, for many souls will go to hell because no one prays and sacrifices for them.”**

Addenda

The Veneration of Relics

To venerate the relics of the saints is a profession of belief in several doctrines of the Catholic faith: (1) the belief in everlasting life for those who have obediently witnessed to Christ and His Holy Gospel here on earth; (2) the truth of the resurrection of the body for all persons on the last day; (3) the doctrine of the splendour of the human body and the respect which all should show toward the bodies of both the living and the deceased; (4) the belief in the special intercessory power which the saints enjoy in heaven because of their intimate relationship with Christ the King; and (5) the truth of our closeness to the saints because of our connection in the communion of saints we as members of the Church militant or pilgrim Church, they as members of the Church triumphant.

Fr. John A. Hardon in the *Modern Catholic Dictionary* says, “Relics are of three classes: the first is part of the saint’s body and is the type placed on the altar stone; the second is part of the clothing or anything used during the saint’s life; and the third is any other object, such as a piece of cloth, that has been touched to a first class relic.” p. 461