

# The mystery of the Ascension



This week, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord. We profess our faith in this glorious mystery when we say in the Nicene Creed: *He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father*. We believe that Jesus' earthly life reached its culmination when He passed from this world to the Father. He no longer belongs to the world of corruption and death that conditions our earthly life. He passed into the glorified state in God.

It is important to understand that the Ascension does not mean that Jesus has departed from us. He has not abandoned us or left us orphans. Otherwise, after the Ascension, the disciples would not have returned to Jerusalem *with great joy*, as

Saint Luke tells us (24:52). He is close to each one of us forever. Recall the words of Jesus at the end of Matthew's Gospel: *And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age* (Matthew 28:19).

With His Ascension into heaven, the Lord Jesus is now present to us in a new way. On the eve of His Passion, Jesus had told the apostles that it was to their advantage that He go away. He said: *It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you: but if I go, I will send Him to you*" (John 16:7). Though Jesus' earthly and visible presence in the world ends, He remains with us in an invisible way. He has not left us alone. He is always close to us.

Christ sends us the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ continues to be with us, sanctifying us and giving us life. He acts through the Holy Spirit in the Church and in our souls. He guides us and leads us to the Father. Christ, the Head, is never separated from His Body, the Church. He entered heaven as our Head. Pope Saint Leo the Great taught that at the Ascension, the glory of the Head became the hope of the Body. This is very true: because Christ has ascended to the Father to prepare a place for us, we have hope of eternal life with Him in heaven.

Exalted at the right hand of the Father, Christ intercedes for us with the Father. He is our eternal High Priest, our Mediator with the Father. As the letter to the Hebrews says: *He always lives to make intercession for them (7:25)*. He communicates to us His Body, the Church, the grace and strength to live in Him. Because of Christ's intercession with the Father, we are able to grow in holiness.

Jesus is present to us in His word and in the sacraments. Jesus is visibly present in the Church in "a sacramental manner." We think especially of His presence in the Holy Eucharist. In the Eucharist, we participate in the new life of Christ's Body glorified by the Spirit. Christ's holy Body and Blood is our food on our journey to the Father's house.

Another important truth about the mystery of the Ascension concerns our own journey to the Father's house. There, Jesus said, He has gone to prepare a place for us. He waits for us. When He ascended into heaven, Jesus took our humanity to God and He opened the path for us to heavenly glory. He united humanity with God forever.

As we meditate on the mystery of Our Lord's Ascension, we also remember His words to the disciples immediately before His Ascension. He not only promises the Holy Spirit, He commands the disciples to go forth as missionaries to the world. He gives them the charge of evangelization. He then gives them the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish this mission.

The Gospel is spread through the power of God, not merely by means of our human wisdom or strength. Our task is to allow ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, and to cooperate with His grace as we seek to bring the Gospel to the world. The Holy Spirit keeps us faithful to the deposit of faith, to the teachings of Jesus. He strengthens us to be Christ's witnesses in word and deed. This is the specific grace we received in the sacrament of Confirmation.

The following words of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, are good for our meditation as we celebrate the Ascension of our Lord:

*The Ascension does not point to Jesus' absence, but tells us that He is alive in our midst in a new way. He is no longer in a specific place in the world as He was before the Ascension. He is now in the lordship of God, present in every space and time, close to each one of us. In our life we are never alone: we have this Advocate who awaits us, who defends us. We are never alone: the Crucified and Risen Lord guides us. We have with us a multitude of brothers and sisters who, in silence and concealment, in their family life and at work, in their problems and hardships, in their joys and hopes, live faith daily and together with us bring the world the lordship of God's love, in the Risen Jesus Christ, ascended into Heaven, our own Advocate who pleads for us.*