

Solemnity of the Ascension – Year A

The great 20th century theologian Karl Rahner was famous for asking the question, “What has also to be true if such and such is true?” or more exactly “What is the condition for the possibility of a certain truth?” He used that to great effect to uncover realities that otherwise would have escaped our notice. The truism that grace builds on nature, for example, was examined to discover that, in order for grace to build on nature, nature has to be oriented toward grace, it has to be designed from the beginning with grace in mind. That says a lot about God’s original intention when creating the world.

The feast of the ascension of Jesus into heaven lends itself well to that sort of comparison of the relationship between A and B. Jesus says that he must go to the Father for the sake of sending the Holy Spirit.

We can plug those realities into the formula: The condition for the possibility of the gift of the Holy Spirit is the ascension of Jesus into heaven.

And the condition for the possibility of receiving the Holy Spirit is the fact that we have been designed to do so from the very beginning! That must have been the plan all along! Otherwise, God would have made human nature in such a way as to condemn it to the fate of never being able to be completely fulfilled, completely alive.

It would be like have a car with a plug-in right behind the driver-side door that wasn’t connected to anything and had no real purpose. We would rightly wonder about such a car, “What’s the point of that? Why did the designer bother to put that there? Seems like a waste of effort.”

Why would God have made us capable of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit if he never intended on giving it?

The Feast of the Ascension is an interim feast. It takes place in the midst of the Easter season, but it is oriented to two moments of fulfillment: Pentecost and the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the age.

We will celebrate Jesus' reign as Christ the King at the end of the liturgical year. But today we recognize that Jesus' ascension has a pertinent point that lies much closer to our present-day reality. He goes that we might receive the Holy Spirit in the here and now, to be empowered by that Spirit for carrying on the mission of proclaiming the good news that Jesus gave his life for, and while doing so to come to the knowledge of our deepest selves: Children of God created for his glory and for participating in the life of the Trinity by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Already today we have cause for rejoicing. Jesus ascends to the Father so that the work of our salvation may be brought to its completion. We are being saved at this very moment. That's good news that is meant to be shared.

General Intercessions

1. For the apostles of the church today, that they may stir up within themselves and the whole church the power they received from the Holy Spirit to be proclaimers of the good news, we pray to the Lord.
2. That Jesus, who mounts his throne amid shouts of joy, may establish his rule over the hearts of world leaders, so that justice, peace and the common good can flourish among the nations, we pray to the Lord.
3. That God may give us all his spirit of wisdom, so that we may know and understand the hope of our calling and the riches of his glory that are our inheritance, we pray to the Lord.
4. For all who are suffering, who think that Jesus has left them behind, that they may come to know the gift of the Holy Spirit is the fullness of God's presence bringing healing and courage until the Lord returns, we pray to the Lord.
5. For our faithful departed ones, that Jesus, whom the Father raised from the dead and seated above every authority and power, may use His dominion to bring them to eternal life in heaven, we pray to the Lord.
6. For all we remember in a particular way this Memorial Day for the sacrifice they gave, may know God's gracious response to their offering of self, we pray to the Lord.