

The Ascension of The Lord, Sunday May 16th 2021 - A reflection By Deacon Mike

This Sunday marks 40 days since we celebrated the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ which, linked with the Incarnation and His Passion, is the most pivotal and phenomenally potent miracle in the whole of human history. No wonder unbelievers and skeptics alike have sought to deny the historicity and reality of the rising of our Savior, the God-man, with a wholly transformed physical body. As we know, the New Testament Scriptures and the Creeds firmly attest to these things. Our Lord left them an important task commanding his followers to spread the Good News of the Gospel beyond the Jewish nation; to disperse and bring the news of God's love and offer of forgiveness to every person in the world. But before this could happen, Jesus was to leave their sight and his disciples were to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come in power as promised by the Father and prophesied by John the Baptist at the beginning of Christ's ministry.

When I was a young boy, I was very interested in space travel and even dreamt of becoming an astronaut. It was more of a fantasy really because my body just was not designed for the rigours of astronaut training, but my aspirations were fed by reading comics about Flash Gordon and Dan Dare (for those like me growing up in the UK). Even as a teenager, when the realization hit that I was not fit for space travel, I ardently followed the NASA Mercury and Apollo missions. When I was 15, I stayed up all night to watch the Apollo Lunar landing on our black and white TV. My older brother stayed up with me, but he soon dozed off. Not me! I was glued to the "goggle box" all night totally enraptured and enthralled: history was unfolding before my eyes. I even went to school the next day still delirious with joyous satisfaction. It is one of my most intriguing and vivid memories; certainly, reinforcing my profound interest in science and engineering. Etched in my memory is the many times I watched rockets on television blast into space after dramatic, crescendo-building countdowns. I also have some far less interesting recollections of pictures presented in Sunday School (children liturgy), of Jesus floating leisurely up in the air and being swallowed up by a puffy cloud. As I grew older I much preferred imagining Our Lord roaring vertically into space, with flames shooting out of the bottom of his feet, and eventually becoming a dot in the sky before disappearing entirely. Awesome! This is the picture that emerged in my mind as I tried to visualize how the scriptures describe Christ's Ascension. However, I realized as I meditated on today's scripture passages, the high velocity, rocket-man in my imagination was totally misleading. After all, did not Our Lord say to His disciples, "Behold I am with you always", and "where two or more of you are gathered, there am I in the midst". What about the Real Presence in the Sacrament? We also understand God's presence to be everywhere and all encompassing. The Creator permeates His creation. See Jeremiah 23: 24 *Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord.*

When Jesus was born, He humbled himself, i.e. He laid aside His rightful place of honour and authority in order to become the Saviour of the World (see Philippians ch. 2). Only someone who was both divine and human could accomplish this. Because of Jesus exemplary life, atoning death and resurrection, sin and death were defeated. When Jesus ascended, He did not travel to somewhere beyond our universe, beyond our reach. His presence is here with us, but we cannot experience Him in a corporeal form until He appears at the end of the age when we will receive a resurrected body like His. At that time when the Heaven and the Earth will be transformed into the New Heaven and New Earth (See Revelation 21) where we hope to be among those who are fully transformed into the likeness of Jesus, reflecting His holiness; thus, enabling his overcoming disciples, who have placed their whole trust in the Father despite suffering and trials, to stand in His full-on presence with Jesus the Son at His side in the New Jerusalem. This is known as the Beatific Vision. This is the salvation planned and promised by God which is potentially available to every person through the death and Resurrection of Christ. When Jesus ascended, He took his place as the King of the Universe at the right hand of God. It is said that the number of times something is mentioned in the Bible is an indication of the importance of that thing. In the New testament, Jesus' place at his Father's right hand is mentioned about 20 times. Because of the Resurrection and the Ascension, we can know that the Son is both God and man

The writer to the Hebrews helps us understand why Jesus' humanity was necessary. Ch.4 says *Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

These words from Hebrews can be a great comfort and inspiration to us as we struggle through the third wave of the Covid 19 pandemic in which social interactions are very limited and we are unable to receive the Blessed Sacrament. We can be thankful that more and more people have the opportunity to be vaccinated. Much more than that, because of what Jesus accomplished on Earth and His intercession at the right hand of the Father, we can indeed, through our prayers, personal devotions and liberal doses of God's grace, boldly approach the throne of Father and Son in the power of the Holy Spirit who was poured out on the Church at Pentecost.

Blessings,

Deacon Mike