

Homily Notes – Ascension Sunday – May 24, 2020

Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23; Matthew 28:16-20

1. **Summary:** Today's readings describe the Ascension of the Lord Jesus into his heavenly glory forty days after his resurrection, after promising his Holy Spirit as the source of heavenly power for his disciples and after commanding them to bear witness to him throughout the world (Mt. 28:16-20, Mk 16:14-20).
2. **When we talk about “the Ascension”, what are we really talking about?** Can we believe this?
3. **Example,** back when I was young, about 1960, three years after Sputnik, **two Jehovah Witnesses** came by while I was mowing the yard and said that we should never be sending spaceships up because that was God's heaven and we had no business being there. We argued for nearly two hours. **But what then is meant by “the Ascension” and “going to be with the Father in heaven.”**
4. **Perhaps better to talk about another “dimension” of reality that may be in part present with us and part in a completely different reality.** Perhaps some of these “near death” and “out of body” experiences might point us in the true direction.
5. **Out of body, near death experiences.** Thinking about children and explaining this, I thought of a little boy, about four years old, who experienced something like this. Colton Burpo is a little boy who almost died on the operating table having an appendix that had ruptured. He later recounted to his parents how he left his body, floated around the hospital and “went to heaven.” This would seem to be very unreal except for the fact that he could document things that were going on in different rooms and he found out about a sister that had been still-born. His experience points to a different “dimension”. As he “floated” around the hospital, no one could see him. That may be like the different dimension that is spiritual but contiguous with us.
6. **No one could see “him” as he left his body. This sounds very much like his “soul” leaving his body for a time.** He saw his father praying and violently arguing with God. He met a sister in heaven who had never been born and he told his parents that she didn't have a name. They had only had a name for a boy and never for a girl, so she had no name. He had never seen his grandfather, “Pop”, but could pick him out of a picture.
7. He described what Jesus looked like similar to a picture painted by another child prodigy painter and mystic, Akiane. Colton Burpo identified her painting of Jesus as the Jesus he saw in heaven.
8. **It would appear that Jesus seeming to ascend off into the sky was one way of Him leaving our dimension to go to the eternal dimension.** Being immaculately conceived and born of the Blessed Virgin Mary was the way he entered this physical world. Thousands of people have experienced this separation of body and soul, going to heaven or hell and returning with knowledge they had not had before. See my study sheet on “Evidences for the Supernatural” for much more detail for this “supernatural” dimension.

What I want to say is that our experience and evidence in this life shows a way that makes the Ascension of Jesus very possible and very real.

9. **The Ascension represents the culmination of Jesus' physical life on earth;** corresponding to the Nativity (or to the Annunciation) as the time when Jesus came to earth in the Incarnation. What is celebrated is Jesus' exaltation into heaven at the right hand of the Father, and the end of his earthly existence as a prelude to the gift of the Spirit. The Ascension and Pentecost, together, mark the beginning of the Church.
10. **This event encourages us** because since we have been united to Christ in Baptism, as members of the Body of the Church of which He is the head, we will be drawn with Him to heaven in glory where he now sits to intercede for us. St. Augustine says it well, “Out of compassion for us he descended from heaven, and although he ascended alone, we also ascend, because we are in him by grace. We are

encouraged because the body (us) cannot be separated from the head”: (See CCC 659-667 for teaching on the Ascension).

Commentary on the Readings:

11. The first reading from the Acts of the Apostles describes the scene of Jesus’ ascension into the eternal realm and his promise of the Holy Spirit and the missionary command to bear witness to him.

12. In the second reading St Paul explains the theological meaning of Jesus’ exaltation. He explains, “*May God enlighten the eyes of our heart so that we may know the great hope to which we have been called.*” This is exactly what we hope we might gain through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Although risen and ascended, Jesus is still with us as his Holy Spirit, in the Holy Bible, in the Holy Eucharist, in the other sacraments and in the praying community. The intensity of this description explains why Christians have been willing to risk all to serve and witness to Jesus.

13. A near and urgent fear. This description of Jesus’s honor and power, seated at the right hand of God makes me very uneasy about the way our culture is attempting to marginalize our faith and the position of the Christian religion, especially the part about our heavenly reward or our punishment in Hell. I wonder what the judgment of God will be like for those who have rejected Him and His Son, especially when we are a culture that has murdered over 50 million of our children before they were born?

14. Today’s Gospel tells us that, with his return to the Father, Jesus completes his mission on earth. In the descriptions of Christ after his resurrection, we are given a hint of what life will be like in heaven. But it is in his Ascension that we see him entering fully into the life and glory of God. The prospect of sharing that glory should be the driving force of our lives. The promise of His help through the Holy Spirit should encourage us.

15. What does this mean for us?

- 1. It strengthens our faith.** It demonstrates the supernatural approval of Jesus and His entering again into his position of power, at the right hand of God in the heavens (Eph 1:20).
- 2. It makes clear his superiority to all other earthly authorities.**
- 3. It makes clear that we are called to do five things:**
 - 1). to go into all the world, preaching the Gospel of repentance to all for the forgiveness of sins to every creature (to all)(Luke 24:47 & Mk16:15),
 - 2) making disciples of all nations,
 - 3) baptizing believers in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
 - 4) teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and
 - 5) to know (behold) that I am with you to the end of the age (Matt 28:19-20).

16. The Video, “The Veil Removed: The Catholic Reformation”, shows us in a visible form that which is really present at every Mass. Let me share it with you.

Does this prove anything? No. It is a reconstructed presentation of what the Bible and our Tradition has always insisted is going on at the Mass. Let us have the faith and the spiritual eyes to appreciate this!

17. The vision of angels reminds us that, among other responsibilities, they come to take our prayers to heaven. See Revelation 5:8 for an example of the saints having our prayers in their bowls. See William Barclay’s Commentary on this verse for many examples of how the angels were seen to be the intermediaries who took our prayers before God.

17. Reflection questions:

1. What is the one point that Jesus wants me to get out of this Mass to help me become the-better-version-of myself that God wants?
2. If the video’s vision of the angels at the Eucharist is true, how important should the Eucharist be for us?
3. If the ascended Jesus is as important and as powerful as our second reading sets forth, how do you feel about and what should we do about the attempt to eliminate Christian influence from our country’s institutions?