

Homily for the Ascension of our Lord, May 10, 2018

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

"Then He led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up His hands, He blessed them. While He was blessing them, He withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven."

- Luke 24:50-51

The Ascension is a mystery, yet not in the way we normally use that word. It's not something to be solved. When we use the word mystery in the Church what we mean is it's something to be pondered. It's something about which we should ask, so what does this mean for us?

Christmas is a mystery - it's the mystery of the Incarnation - of God taking on our flesh and dwelling among us. The Passion is a mystery, that God would take our sin, your sin, all sin into Himself and make it His sin. That God would become a sinner, the greatest sinner, and suffer the punishment due to sinners for the sake of all sinners? That's a mystery to be pondered, to ask ourselves so what does this mean for me? The Resurrection is a mystery. That God can defeat death makes sense, that man can stand up and walk out of the grave is a mystery.

The Ascension is also a mystery. Not because God has gone up with a shout like we sang with the Psalmist, but because man has been exalted to heaven and sits at the right hand of God. That's a mystery, it's something to ponder, something about which we should ask, so what does this mean for me?

The Ascension is the bookend of the Incarnation. Just as God took on flesh and dwelt among us, now humanity has been taken into the presence of God and dwells there. So just as the Incarnation brought with it a promise and good news for us, so does the Ascension.

In the Incarnation God took flesh and become one with us. The Creator of the heavens took on flesh to enter the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Infinity became finite. God, through whom all life came into existence, is Himself given life in Mary's womb. God who nourishes and feeds all things, is nourished and fed at the Virgin's breast. God who spends His time cleaning up our mess, messes His diaper and has it changed by Joseph. God through whom comes wisdom and the law, is taught the law and wisdom by His parents. He who is life sees His earthly father die. He who is health and wholeness comes face to face with the leper, the lame, the blind man, the bleeding woman. He in whose presence the angels sing, stands at the tomb and weeps over the death of the friend He loves.

And all the while He works His way to the cross. There in the Jordan He identified Himself with sinners, and bathed in their sins, making them His - and it pleased the Father! There in the synagogues, streets, and homes of Galilee He took their sickness and death, making them His - and it pleased the Father! There in the Garden He took even the fear of death, even the desire to avoid God's will, making them His - and it pleased the Father. He took everything in us that is opposed to God and God's will, and making it His - and it pleased the Father.

God the Son emptied Himself and humbled Himself even to the point of death, even death on a cross. God entered death and the grave, so nothing can separate God from you. That's the mystery of the Incarnation.

But now there is another mystery. Just as God did things we never expected, now man does the impossible. In the resurrection Man walked out of the grave, and the power of death has been broken. Man who was defeated by the devil, has now defeated the devil.

So too, now in the Ascension the direction of the Incarnation is reversed. Now has man ascended into heaven to dwell with God. The dust of the earth, exalted above all things. Man, banished from Eden, entered Paradise. Death came to all things through man, now through man comes eternal life. The flesh of man that struggled to bring bread from the earth and toiled itself to death, has become the

very bread of life and cup of salvation. Man, so easily conquered by wind, rain, snow, and powers unseen; who is finite and insignificant against the cosmos; is now the one under whose feet the cosmos are but a footstool.

Even so the heights of the mystery are only fully seen here: at the font, the pulpit, and the altar. For now that God has descended to earth, and man has ascended to heaven the separation of the two is broken. It is broken here.

Here Heaven bends to earth at the pulpit as Jesus Christ, God and man, proclaims to you all He has done for your sake.

Here Heaven bends to earth at the font where the Father, through Holy Spirit, unites you to Jesus who sits enthroned among the cherubim.

Here Heaven bends to earth at the altar where the angels bow and sing before their God and King as He feeds you on His own flesh and blood.

Here Heaven bends to earth, and you receive a foretaste of what is to come: life with God forever. Not in some distant heaven, but in a new heaven and new earth united by the throne of God. For just as Jesus resurrection is the promise of your resurrection, so His Ascension is the promise that you will dwell with God and God will dwell with you.

And that is what we wait for. Not staring into the heavens looking for Jesus, like the disciples did. We now where He is, at the right hand of the Father, even as He comes to us here where His Word is preached and His Sacraments are given. For here heaven comes to earth as Christ comes to you. Amen.