

Ascension Sunday
Cycle C – May 15-16, 2010

“He Ascended Into Heaven”

With regard to celebrating the feast of our Lord’s Ascension, the fortieth day after Easter, the following ecclesiastical Provinces still maintain the celebration on the proper Thursday: Boston, Hartford, New York, Newark, Omaha, and Philadelphia. The Province of Ohio, that is the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, and its suffragan sees of Toledo, Cleveland, Youngstown, Steubenville, and Columbus celebrate the Ascension of Our Lord on the Seventh Sunday of Easter. Exceptions to this rule would apply to those congregations united with Rome and united to the local Latin Rite Ordinary who have indults to celebrate on Thursday, the 40th day after Easter, in accord with their own approved calendars of celebrations.

We profess in the Creed each Sunday that Christ ‘ascended into heaven.’ Those words are found in the Acts of the Apostles 1: 1-12, as read in today’s Mass. After 40 days of miraculous appearances, the Lord Jesus, risen from the dead, prepares the apostles for His departure, the eventual coming of the Holy Spirit, and the birth of the Church with its mission to continue the saving works of

Jesus. It is noted in the Acts of the Apostles that the followers of Jesus were returning to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives [Acts 1: 12] where the Ascension took place. On the other hand, St. Luke 24: 50 records that Jesus ascended on the evening of Easter Sunday which implies in God's mind that there is no time frame for these holy events and that there are several human perceptions of the one paschal mystery; several perceptions of the death, resurrection, ascension, and descent of the Holy Spirit. Be that as it may, the completed paschal mystery of Jesus, which is our redemption, means that Jesus is exalted beyond death, reigns above this world in His Ascension, and the church is born and continues the work of Jesus by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The early church concludes that there was one process of redemption, the Lord's Paschal Mystery but that many of the early Christians were allowed miraculously, to experience Christ's one redemption in different time frames. Consequently, we have one account of the Ascension in Acts of the Apostles, and another in Luke's gospel.

There are ancient ideas of exaltation or ascension that come from early Judaism as in the legends of Moses, Elijah, Enoch and Isaiah being taken to heaven. In the New Testament the idea of ascension and exaltation is found in Ephesians 4: 8-10; Hebrews 4: 14, 6: 20, 7: 26, 8: 1; I Peter 3: 22; and I Timothy 3: 16.

For us Catholic-Christians the solemnity of the Lord's Ascension marks the close of the post-Resurrection appearances; that Christ's humanity is in heaven where Christ sits at the right hand of the Father, that is, God the Son takes His place with God the Father.

Alongside with the accounts in Scripture there are many early artistic renderings of the ascension that are found in mosaics and icons dating back to 100 and 150 ad. And until 1970 the paschal candle was extinguished after the reading of the gospel to emphasize the physical absence of Jesus who had gone home to the Father. We do not extinguish the paschal candle (since 1970) to indicate that Easter is celebrated for 50 days, from Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday which means that the light, the splendor, and glory of the paschal mystery does not end with the Ascension, but continues into Pentecost, into

the fire of the Holy Spirit descending like tongues of flame on the Apostles and Our Blessed Lady.

But many ask why? Why did He leave us? Thomas Aquinas and many, many good theologians have told us that Jesus left us, left His believers, so that His redemption would take hold of the human race, according to the natural laws of the earth. That means that Jesus is not imposing His redemption, His Kingdom, His rule on all of us all at once. But slowly, generation after generation, through the natural disclosure of everyday teaching of the catechism, the gospels, and the celebration of the sacraments, each new generation of human beings has the freedom to choose Jesus. It is said by some of the saints that when the world wakes up and embraces Jesus as Lord, Saviour, Son of God, and Redeemer of humanity; when Jesus can be found in the minds, hearts and souls of humanity and proclaimed by us in our words and actions, that Jesus is our salvation and that He is unique, that is, one Lord, one Saviour, one Baptism, one Church, one way to the one God and Father of us all, then, possibly it will be time for Christ to return. But in the meantime, Christ asks us, with the help of the Holy Spirit,

to know Him, to love Him, to serve Him, to proclaim the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth. Christ has removed Himself from the earth, not to abandon us, but to allow us to choose Him, freely, generation after generation in keeping with the laws of nature and our freedom. We choose Jesus not because we are forced to choose Him, but because He is our hope, the answer to this life and the answer to Life after life.

So we pray: *Lord Jesus, risen and ascended, you took Your place at the right hand of the Father, not to abandon us, but to be our hope in this life and in the Life to come. Strengthen our hope in You. Help us to follow your example of living and loving in this world so that we may live and love supremely well in the next world, where You live, Lord Jesus, forever and ever. Amen.*

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