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During the octave of the Ascension, we pray *that as we believe thy only begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended into the heavens; so we may also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with him continually dwell.* This beautiful Collect of the church sums up what the Church teaches on the Ascension and makes it applicable to us. It gives us the reason for celebrating this great feast. Jesus ascends into heaven so that we may follow Him, just as in the great feast of Easter, Jesus is resurrected from the dead, defeating the bonds of sin and death so that we too may be freed from sin and raised from the dead at the Last Day. The Resurrection frees us from slavery to sin and death and brings us into relationship with God the Father, and the Ascension shows us where that relationship intends to take us, straight to Heaven! Jesus ascends to heaven, to the right hand of the Father, so that the Holy Spirit may descend upon everyone who loves Him, that *He may dwell in us and we in Him.*

The Ascension is the completion of the Easter Season. During those forty-days the Risen Lord had been with His disciples, teaching them and preparing them for what was to come next. The Ascension is the perfect conclusion to our Lord's extraordinary earthly ministry. As the Disciples and the Blessed Virgin Mary witnessed the Lord ascend into the heavens with their own eyes. They cannot doubt what they had seen. Neither can they deny that what they had witnessed had been foretold by the Scriptures and by Jesus Himself. The Disciples had witnessed the foreshadowing of Jesus' Resurrection through the raising of Lazarus, Jairus's daughter, and the Widow of Nain's son as recorded in the Gospels. These people were raised from the dead by Jesus Christ, and they lived to die again. However, the Ascension is foreshadowed in the Old Testament, through the lives of Enoch and the prophet Elijah. We read in Genesis that Enoch was a friend of God, and that *Enoch walked with God and was no more, for God took him.* Likewise, the great prophet Elijah, when he had finished all the work that God had set out for him to do, crossed the Jordan River and a fiery chariot descended from heaven to carry Elijah to God. What is curious though about these two characters from the Old Testament is that the scriptures do not say that Enoch and Elijah died. The tradition of the Church, and the tradition of the Rabbis is that these two men never died but were assumed into heaven. One other person is believed to have been assumed into heaven, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her Assumption is not recorded in the Scriptures, but according to tradition she was assumed bodily into heaven on her death bed.

The Assumptions of Enoch and Elijah foreshadow the Ascension of Jesus Christ, while the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary perhaps is a

privilege of her being the Mother of Jesus Christ. However, the Ascension of Christ is more mysterious and glorious because through Him, our own flesh and bone in His glorified and resurrected human flesh, is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, making intercession for us. The Ascension proves to us that God is not some untouchable monarch whose divinity can be sullied by human nature. God has taken our nature upon Himself, has risen from the tomb and glorified that nature, and retains that nature even as He reigns with God the Father. Let us also consider that Enoch, Elijah, and the Blessed Virgin Mary are around the throne of God, worshipping Him, they who are also of our own flesh and bone. Even though we consider these figures from the Scriptures to be among the great saints of God whose holy lives may have deserved such a glorious end, yet we should be encouraged by them, that where these fully human and holy ones have gone so will we.

We pray today that we will be given the grace to *in heart and mind thither ascend* where Jesus Christ has gone. While we confess and believe that we ascend to heaven mystically through the Mass, yet we must not believe that the Mass is as far as we will ever come to our own Ascension. We pray that when we pass from this mortal life that we will go to heaven and be with God. But let us not forget that Jesus promised us before He ascended, *I am the Resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall I raise him up at the last day*. St. Paul also writes that at the last day the dead will be rise and the living will be changed, and we will be *caught up in the air to meet the Lord*. We too will physically be assumed into heaven and our glorified bodies; glorified flesh and bone, will stand before the throne of God.

But before we are caught up to meet the Lord, *our hearts and minds must thither ascend*, we must keep our hearts and minds focused on our Lord Jesus Christ. Our hearts and minds must thither ascend to God through prayer, through growth in charity and in every virtue, through participating in the Mass, and through receiving the bread and wine, the Body and Blood of Him who has died, risen and ascended. The Lord has ascended so that He may prepare a place for us, that where He is, we may go also. Jesus ascends to send us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, He has not left us comfortless, nor does He leave us to our own devices. Let us rejoice! For the Lord has given us the greatest help in following Him to heaven through the Sacraments of His Church. Amen.