

*That God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever.*

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This past Thursday we commemorated a most wonderful event -- Jesus Christ ascending to heaven, taking His human flesh into heaven and uniting it to the majesty of God. It was not an illusion. *A spirit hath not flesh and blood as ye see me have*, he assured his disciples after the Resurrection. He who was taken up into heaven was the same person who ate, drank, and talked with his friends during the forty days after his resurrection. Here was further proof that their Master was God, and because he is God, we have hope of ourselves sharing the glory of God, when someday we “thither ascend”.

Thus Jesus ascends to *prepare a place for us* (John 14.2), but, more immediately, he ascends in order to send the Holy Spirit so that we might be prepared to *ascend thither*. He is the “*Comforter*”, who will guide us into all truth. He is the One who strengthens in the midst of difficult situations, even in times of fear. He is the One who gives hope in seemingly hopeless circumstances of life. He is the One who helps us to bear burdens too heavy to bear alone. And so, while we journey here below, our hearts and minds *thither ascend* and by faith dwell with him there. By faith we see him seated at the right hand of the Father, ever interceding for us, ever comforting us with the gift of his Holy Spirit.

We see the transforming power of the Holy Ghost in the lives of the Disciples throughout the book of Acts. Right before Jesus ascends to heaven they ask Him, *are you going to restore again the Kingdom of Israel?* They were concerned with earthly security and comforts. They realized that their neighbors hoped and prayed for the renewal of an earthly kingdom and that they would be less interested in the Heavenly Kingdom. They wanted a kingdom they could see, just as doubting Thomas wanted to see the flesh and blood body of Jesus in order to believe. For them seeing is not only believing but casts out fear and doubt. The Disciples were obviously fearful of a world without Jesus. Imagine their fear at seeing Jesus ascend into heaven, it must have been the fear of the Crucifixion and Resurrection all over again. This time though they see the ascension happen with their own eyes, they see the bright light, Jesus taken up into heaven, and they see the two strange men who asked them, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? The disciples were obviously afraid, they stand gazing, dumbfounded. Maybe some of them fell on their faces on the ground before such an experience like at the Transfiguration. And the Gospel tells us too that the Disciples who witnessed the Transfiguration were overcome with fear, and became as dead men. They were overcome by fear at the Ascension too.

The fear the Disciples experience is the fear of having come face to face with God and God’s power. The Ascension is one more example that Jesus has overcome and conquered the world. He shows them that He has the real power, power far greater than anything on the earth. Jesus tells them Himself they will be persecuted and even killed for His sake, but He reminds them, *fear not them that can kill the body and not the soul, rather fear Him who can kill destroy*

*both body and soul in hell.* The fear the Disciples experience is a transforming fear, which when mixed with the Holy Ghost inspires them to take the Gospel to all people in spite of danger, sorrow, and even death. For Jesus Christ and His Gospel has the power to overcome even death.

Therefore the Ascension is a day of rejoicing! Blessed John Keble writes, *Our savior's exaltation ought in all reason to lift us, heart and soul on high after Him...for He has overcome our spiritual enemies...He has gone into heaven, the first fruits of a whole harvest to be redeemed and by that glorious ascension we know something of what is prepared for those who try to ascend thither in heart and mind. We know that nothing possibly can be too high or too glorious for faithful Christians to hope for, seeing that He who is their pattern and example is raised to the right hand of the Almighty Father.*

Our Lord has dived into the depths of humanity, down into fear, death, the grave, and hell, and has come back up through the Resurrection and Ascends up into heaven to the Father. Jesus has overcome the world, He has conquered our fears by overcoming our spiritual enemies that we may also *thither ascend* with Him. If we are in communion with Jesus Christ, then we have nothing to fear. He is the perfect pattern and example for us who is also praying for us continually. But Jesus goes even beyond this, beyond being our pattern and example, beyond praying for us and interceding for us to God the Father, by sending down the Holy Spirit upon us to dwell in and with us.

The Holy Spirit gives us the strength and courage of Christ, it empowers us to withstand the fears of the world. The Holy Spirit reminds us of where our priorities are and who we place our trust in. The Holy Spirit reveals to us all truth, regardless of our education or station in life. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can in heart and mind ascend with Christ, that one day we may bodily ascend with Christ. Yet worldly fear, pride, anger, lust, and sin, keep us chained to the world, and resists the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, our minds, and our lives.

Jesus has ascended into heaven and the Holy Spirit has descended on us. The Holy Spirit has drawn us here this morning to Mass. That here with the rest of our local Body of Christ we may ascend to heaven and receive another dose of the Holy Spirit through Jesus' own body and blood. This is the act of perfect love which casts out all fear. We are invited to bring to Christ our fears and anxieties and receive Him in return. We are invited to leave our fears and anxieties, our sins, to leave it all behind and ascend with Jesus. This is the message of the Ascension and God's design for our lives. As the writer to the Hebrews reminds us, *seeing then that we have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have to an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.* Amen.