

Out of the Upper Room - II

The Ascension



This Sunday we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord – 40 days after Easter, well if it were exactly 40 days we would be celebrating it on Thursday (tomorrow), but in Canada we move the celebration to the Sunday to allow for more of the faithful to attend Mass and celebrate.

What are celebrating exactly? Doesn't this seem like another sad goodbye for Jesus' apostles? They just got him back and now he's going again. Jesus has been preparing his followers (that includes all of us) for his Ascension into heaven. For the last few weeks we've been hearing Jesus instructing that he will not stay on earth with us forever, but will send the Advocate to remain with us. This wasn't a surprise to his followers (still includes us), we know he will be going into heaven.

I can't imagine what his apostles felt when he was telling them he was leaving, maybe there was some doubt, "Yeah, sure you are, you left us before and look at you now!" Or maybe some fear, "How can he leave us again? Why would he do this to us?" And maybe there was some understanding.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Acts 1:10-11

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In the Gospel this Sunday we hear Jesus telling the apostles what they will be capable of as believers by using his name, "they will cast out demons; they will speak in tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." (Mark 16: 17-18) Pretty epic really. He didn't just leave them, he had been preparing them (us) and instructing them (us) to go on, he left a helper, the Advocate, and promised that he is with them (us) always.

The feast of the Ascension should really be a joyful celebration— it is the final triumph of the Risen Lord. He is now seated at the right hand of the Father! We also know this isn't a goodbye— Jesus promised that he is with us always, to the end of the age."

The Catechism teaches us three truths about Jesus through his Ascension into heaven:

1. Christ's Ascension marks the definitive entrance of Jesus' humanity into God's heavenly domain, whence he will come again (cf. Acts 1:11); this humanity in the meantime hides him from the eyes of men (cf. Col 3:3).

2. Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, precedes us into the Father's glorious kingdom so that we, the members of his Body, may live in the hope of one day being with him for ever.
3. Jesus Christ, having entered the sanctuary of heaven once and for all, intercedes constantly for us as the mediator who assures us of the permanent outpouring of the Holy Spirit (665-667).

Super clear, right?

Let's maybe break it down just a little bit, shall we?

Jesus' humanity— his humanness— enters into heaven— he goes first so we too, lowly humans that we are, may follow to remain with him forever. Also, Jesus intercedes for us constantly. Constantly! Always. Forever. Non-stop— for the permanent outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit who he promised he'd send to us (who we receive in Baptism and are sealed in at Confirmation, that came to the apostles at Pentecost— more on that next week).

Doesn't this all sound like an occasion to celebrate?



Let us pray

*[on this day of Ascension as we watch
and wait for Jesus' return]*

*Father in heaven,
our minds were prepared
for the coming of your kingdom
when you took Christ beyond our sight
so that we might seek him in glory.
May we follow where he has led
and find our hope in his glory,
for he is Lord forever. Amen*

-New Saint Joseph Sunday Missal

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