

ASCENSION 2024

If, as St Luke writes: *"there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents"* then it is hard to imagine the amazing celebration in heaven at the return of Jesus from His rescue mission of love. He returned, however, with more than He left with. He returned with our wounded humanity. But He left earth, leaving us more than we had before He came. What does this mean for us?

I think it can be summed up in one word: GLORY!

We are bound for the same destination as Jesus, and we are invited to share in the same gift, glory: *"where the head has gone...the body will follow in hope"*. Are you ready for Glory that is yours by adoption, or as Paul says in the second reading, to become fully mature with the fullness of Christ?

The Acts of the Apostles makes the point that after the resurrection and before the Ascension Jesus asked the disciples to remain in the city and wait. What were they to waiting for? The promise of the Father; there was more to come, with God there is always more. His death and his imminent return to heaven did not mean that all was now done and dusted. The Father had always intended to give a gift, a permanent reminder that we belong to Him. Jesus said to his disciples: *"...you will receive power when the Spirit comes, then you will be my witnesses."* St Mark explains what this power is, signs *"that will be associated with believers"* in His name demons will be cast out, believers will speak a spiritual prayer language, pick up snakes and be unharmed even from deadly poison, meanwhile the sick will be healed when hands are laid upon them.

Hence St Irenaeus writes *"Those who are truly disciples, receiving grace from Him, perform miracles in His name for the wellbeing of others, according to the gifts which each one receives from Him."*

The Ascension, as Jesus explained elsewhere in scripture, meant that we, His disciples, would share more fully in His mission, in fact, as we heard in the Gospel of John recently, we are empowered not only to do the same works as Jesus carried out, but even greater (Jn 14:12). So that is the first thing for us to be very clear about, the Ascension is not about saying goodbye to Jesus as He returns to heaven. In no way does it separate us from Jesus, rather it takes us to a completely new and exciting level of relationship. The Ascension speaks of our inclusion in the intimate life and mission of God – it takes us to the very heart of everything.

Secondly the Ascension points to the truth, that we are heirs with Christ, and it would be simply impossible to imagine the life of Jesus, His ministry and preaching without the accompanying signs and wonders. Did these stop with His Ascension, was that the end? Clearly not, the gifts that Mark speaks of, and Jesus promised are not extraordinary happenings for the period of the incarnation or the time of the apostles

only. Rather they are part of our inheritance as missionary disciples because the incarnation has never come to an end – we are His body now on earth, as Teresa of Avila said, His eyes and hands, His feet and heart.

The Catechism reminds us that because of the ascension, the *“renewal of the world is irrevocably under way...Christ’s kingdom already manifests its presence through miraculous signs that attend its proclamation...”* (ccc670).

If God can enter our time and space at the incarnation. If during Jesus’ time on earth he could make the kingdom present through preaching and through healing, prophecy and casting our demons, and if through the action of the Holy Spirit God can change bread and wine into the living presence of Jesus each day at Mass, then I am simple enough to believe in His promise to be with us and anoint us with the gifts that we need to proclaim that Kingdom today.

Jesus came to proclaim that we are partners in Good News. That Good news has been spoken over us and into us so that we embody that Good News now. We were created before the foundation of the world to share in heaven, encounter the embrace of the Trinity. With that embrace comes a promise – a gift – the Ascension has not left us orphans, but sent us on a mission to announce liberation, healing, and transformation.

WE ARE MADE FOR GLORY.

Abbot Robert Igo, OSB
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