



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Solemnity of the Ascension June 1, 2003

“Make us joyful in the ascension of your Son Jesus Christ.”

That was what we asked of God the Father in the Opening Prayer of this Mass. What are the reasons why we should be joyful in the ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ?

Our Lord himself, in his discourse at the Last Supper, gives us the first reason. “If you loved me,” he says, “you would be glad that I am going to the Father.” Our Lord’s ascension is his “going to the Father”, that is, the ascension of his sacred humanity into the glory of heaven, into the glory of his Father, the supreme exaltation of the one who, by his Passion and Death, has forever conquered sin and death. How fitting that he who thus emptied himself for our sake should be so exalted forever. If we open our hearts to allow our love for him to grow, that love for him which is greater than our love for ourself, then we shall rejoice in his ascension as the fitting triumph of the one who, by humbling himself, became the Savior of the world.

The second reason for our rejoicing in the ascension pertains to our own good. The Opening Prayer alludes to it when it declares that the ascension of Jesus Christ is “our hope.” Why “our hope”? The Second Reading, from Saint Paul, explains this. Saint Paul speaks in that reading of the hope which belongs to our call as Christians. The object of this hope, what God has prepared for those who love him, is so great, says Saint Paul, that we need a special gift of wisdom and revelation in order to know it; the only words he puts forward to refer to it are “the riches of the glory of the heritage he has prepared for us among the saints”. But how can we, weak and sinful human beings, hope for anything so immense? We can hope for it, Saint Paul says, because the Father is “rich in mercy”, and because he has promised to exercise in us the same power, the same “great might”, “which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens, far above every principality, authority, power, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the age to come.” The same power of the Father which worked the resurrection and ascension in Christ, then, will work a like resurrection and ascension in us. In the light of this stupendous truth we can indeed call the ascension of Christ “our hope”, for it reveals to us what is, by the infinite mercy of God, our destiny; and so, again, we rejoice.

But this is not all. There is, still, a third reason for rejoicing, a reason veiled in mystery. For, the Sacred Scriptures clearly indicate, in the baptized Christian, who is living in faith and grace, in some profound sense the ascension has already occurred: not yet, certainly, his bodily ascension into heaven, not yet, indeed, his seeing of God as he is, but, nevertheless, in some deep, true sense, the ascension of his soul into the heavenly realms. For, Saint Paul says, “you have died, and now your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also shall appear with him in glory.” How can we say what these words mean? It is better to be silent, and simply to contemplate in our



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heart the ascension of the Lord Jesus, and -- let us say it -- our own ascension, by which, if we are true to it, we have entered the new creation, changed, humbly exalted, forever. As we contemplate, we become aware of a joy within which is full.

“Jesus, our redemption,” the great hymn for this feast sings,

Jesus, our redemption, our love, our desire,
God the creator, Man at the end of time,
May you be our joy, who will be our reward,
Our glory forever, our life without end.