



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Solemnity of the Ascension
May 4, 2008

Saint Louis Abbey
9:00 a.m. Mass

Introduction

We celebrate today the Solemnity of the Ascension, the feast of the ultimate consummation of Our Lord's triumph over sin and death, and therefore one of the great feasts of the Church's year. Where Our Lord has gone, we hope to follow. To prepare ourselves, then, to celebrate these sacred mysteries, let us consider how mindful we are at every moment of our earthly life of this great hope, and ask the Lord for his loving mercy and forgiveness.

Homily

Dear friends, in the Opening Prayer of the Mass for the Ascension, the Church has us pray thus:

Grant, we beseech you, Almighty God
that, believing Your Only-begotten Son, our Redeemer,
to have ascended into heaven on this day,
we too may dwell by our spirit in the heavenly places.

We believe, then, that Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God and our Redeemer, ascended into heaven on this day. He ascended as man, not as God, for as God he has from all eternity ever been in heaven, and has ever filled all things, and this was true during his earthly life as well as before and after that life. But as man, he ascended into heaven. This means, first, that on this day his full glory, as risen man and as Son of God, began to be continuously manifested, and was no longer at times concealed, as it often was during his Resurrection appearances. The closest we can come to understanding this is by the thought of inconceivably brilliant light. Then, secondly, the Ascension means that he as man did in fact go to another place, different from any place in this universe, a place which is somehow a fitting environment, as it were, for his glory, a place which is a true place, but not necessarily in any continuity with the created universe we know. He was seen on this day by the apostles to go up, and we speak of his Ascension, of his going up, but all of this is necessarily, to a considerable extent, only a symbol of what we can only indirectly understand in this life. Finally, the Ascension means, as we say, that "he has sat down at the right hand of God the Father". This is clearly a metaphorical expression, meaning that as man he has the supreme honor from God of all his creations whatsoever, an honor infinitely beyond the honor bestowed on any other person, and it means, also, as we heard in the Gospel for today, that "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him", and in particular the authority to judge all human beings at the Last Judgment.

This, then, is what we believe when we believe in the Ascension of the Lord. It is



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the Lord's supreme and eternal triumph and vindication as man, and we rejoice. But in the Preface of this Mass the liturgy will remind us of the other great truth of this day, that, if we remain faithful in this life, then where the Lord has gone we shall follow. Dear friends, can we take this in? It is so important to try. The faith is telling us nothing less than this, that if we remain, by the Lord's grace, faithful, then we too shall be glorified with risen glory, not indeed the glory of the Only-begotten Son of God incarnate, but the full glory of a risen and glorified and everlasting body. The faith is telling us that, if we remain faithful, we too shall go to where he is now, to "heaven", to the new heaven and earth, to a place which at last is a fitting place for a glorified life of perfect fulfillment and unending and unimaginable bliss. The faith is telling us that, if we remain faithful, we too shall share, for all eternity, in his fullness of authority in heaven and on earth; as the Book of Revelation says: "They will see the Lord face to face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. It will never be night again and they will not need lamplight or sunlight, because the Lord God will be shining on them. They will reign for ever and ever.

So then, on the basis of the merit of our believing in the Ascension, and in our sharing in it which is to come, the Opening Prayer offers its petition: "May we also, by our spirit, dwell in the heavenly places." Grant us, Lord, that we may already begin our ascension in our soul in this life, grant us that we may dwell with you in heaven in our thoughts, in our deepest and most continuous contemplations, by our deepest longing, our greatest love. And why, Lord, do we ask already in this life to dwell in our soul with you in heaven? Because this, Lord, this, this alone, gives us hope, that ultimate hope which we human beings must have lest we perish, that hope which gives us strength to go out into our world and work to bring it into conformity with your will, that hope which gives us strength to endure all the contradictions, the sufferings, the attacks which will assault our work for you and for the coming of your kingdom, that hope which gives us strength to bear all the sufferings of this life, of the loss here of those we love, of the diminishment of our powers, of our own death, that hope which gives us the strength to cry out, "Yes, in all these things we triumph through him who loved us", to cry out, "Yes, yes, all will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of thing will be well." Yes, Lord, it is by this hope, this hope in God, in you, Lord, who are God, in our calling and destiny to be one with you forever in heaven, it is by this hope alone that we are saved, and we ask you, on this your Ascension Day, to begin already to fulfill for us this hope which you have raised up in us.

Dear friends, of all the days of the Church's year, the day of the Lord's Ascension is the great day of hope. So we say to the Lord, in the words of the great office hymn of the day:

O Jesus, may you be our joy
Who are to be our reward;
May our glory ever be in you
For all the ages. Amen.