

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The Ascension of our Lord, the Divine Mystery that we commemorate and celebrate this evening, is a well-documented historic fact. St. Luke records it in detail in the First Chapter of the Book of Acts. The same Evangelist, in his Gospel account, writes that the risen Lord took the Eleven as far as Bethany. There He lifted up His hands and blessed them, and He was parted from them and carried up into heaven.

St. Mark records Christ's Ascension in the last chapter of the Gospel that bears his name, stating simply "He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the Right Hand of God." The Ascension of Christ is an historic fact that you confess at every Mass. For as you confess the Christian faith in the words the Nicene fathers left us, you confess that you believe that "He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the Right Hand of the Father." That short sentence is true, it is a right confession, because it is based on the Divinely Inspired Accounts of the Evangelists.

In order to ascend, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity first had to descend. He was from eternity in heaven. He came down from heaven. God, the eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God of heaven and earth, remained always and forever God, and yet He left the throne upon which the celestial bodies were His footstool. He left the brilliance of the glory and holiness; He left the host of heaven; He left that place of perfect righteousness and sinlessness; and the Eternal Word was made Flesh.

The God who made you became like you. He brought heaven to earth in His Holy Incarnation. The earth to which He came was not brilliant or glorious or holy, it was not righteous or sinless. Nor were you. He came down from heaven save you, to win you back, to purchase you, to set you apart from this fallen world, to make you His own.

The same Evangelists who record His Ascension also chronicle for all time and eternity the holy, sinless life of the Incarnate Lord – His obedience to His earthly parents, His clear teaching and preaching, His miracles, His betrayal, His condemnation, His suffering, His death. He made the Great Exchange – what was rightly yours, your fallenness, your sin, your trespasses, your transgressions, your doubt, your unholiness – He took from you and made His own.

He took what you are upon Himself – He became Man, and although He never sinned, He covered Himself in your sins. And then He paid the price you could not pay. He settled the debt too great for any man to satisfy. His Holy Wounds opened the Treasury of His righteousness, and the Sanguine Currency that flowed forth was payment sufficient for the sins of all men of all times.

He paid for you with His own life. And that redemption, that eternal reconciliation, His perfect holiness, He makes yours, simply by believing in Him. In faith, you are declared to be holy and righteous and without sin. And that faith, faith in Christ, your belief in Him, you receive in Holy Baptism, by the Spirit of the Living God. And that faith, faith in Christ, your belief in Him, you confess at every Mass, with every prayer, and every time you make the Sign of the Cross.

God became Man. He willingly gave up His life. He rose again from the dead on the third day. It is a Mystery too great for understanding, a Mystery apprehended by faith alone. But God multiplies the Mystery by His Ascension. For as great a Mystery as His Incarnation is, that God

came down from heaven and was made Man, perhaps even greater is the Mystery of His Ascension – that being fully Man, risen from the grave, He ascended into heaven, returning to the place from which He came.

Elijah was taken up into heaven. But it wasn't his doing. The chariot of fire and the horses of fire and the whirlwind ushered him up. Enoch too was taken up into heaven. He lived 365 years. He walked with God. And he was no more, for God took him. But the Ascension of Christ was a better Ascension. For no chariot assisted, no fiery mount bore Him, no whirlwind was necessary. The clouds placed through Him at the creation opened to receive their Lord.

He wasn't taken. He ascended by His own power, Divine power, Divine omnipotence. The One who took Enoch up, the One who commands the heavenly chariots and celestial steeds, the One who sends whirlwinds needed no help. On the 40<sup>th</sup> day after He took up His life again, He ascended into heaven. As His baptism was His installation, so in His ascension is His coronation. He is now known to all as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And soon all men will confess the same.

He who is from above returned to His rightful throne, the throne that was always His, now always and fully using the Divine Powers that He always had. For you, O Fleshly Man, in His Ascension there is great comfort and hope. For the Flesh that He took on, your flesh, He took with Him into heaven. In His Ascension, He opened heaven to men.

There is a Man in heaven. He is the Firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep, the First to defeat death and rise to new life. And so is He the Firstfruits of a Holy Harvest that will soon fill heaven, a Harvest of which you, O Redeemed of Christ, are a part. For as in His resurrection you have the promise of your resurrection, so also in His Ascension is the promise of your ascension.

The angelic messengers spoke God's promise clearly: "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." The Ascended Lord will come again. He will come in power and great glory. At His Word, the dead will be raised. And those who sleep the sleep of faith, and those who remain and believe, will follow the Lord as He ascends into heaven, taking His Holy Church with Him, for eternity.

The Ascended Lord is seated at the Right Hand of God, the position of power and authority over all heaven and earth. But in love, in mercy, in grace, the same Ascended Lord places His Body with bread here, at this altar, that it be placed into your mouth. And He makes wine His Blood, that the eternal life He took up be yours, that His forgiveness be yours, that you be strengthened steadfast in saving faith until the Ascended Lord comes again.

Christ is risen, Christ is ascended, Christ reigns victorious now, and forever. Amen.

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