

Ascension Day (B)

17<sup>th</sup> May 2015

'Humanity called home to Heaven'

Acts 1: *He was lifted up while they looked on ...*

Eph 4: *the one who rose higher than all the heavens is ... he who descended*

Mk 16: 15-20: *there at the right hand of God He took His place*

The greatest feasts of the year — Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Ascension Day, and Pentecost — each have special texts within the First Eucharistic Prayer ... I'll use that special text today, ... “Celebrating the most sacred day on which Your only-begotten Son, our Lord, placed at the right hand of Your glory our weak human nature, which He had united to Himself ...” It reminds us that a key part of today's celebration is the fact that Our Lord Jesus takes to the realm of heaven the human nature He had assumed when He became man in the womb of Our Lady. The Son of God did not take flesh as if He put on a suit of clothes that He could just as easily shed. He does not abandon that human nature when He ascends to heaven; any more than He abandoned it when He rose from the dead. Jesus rose from the dead in a human body — He showed Himself to His apostles in bodily form; He allowed them to touch Him; and He ate before their eyes; and

convinced them by the marks of crucifixion in His hands and side. So, in the same way, He doesn't even abandon His human body when He ascends back to the Father in heaven. His humanity isn't irrelevant to Jesus ... He has taken on human nature precisely to draw humanity into the joys of the divinity. When Jesus ascends, He takes human flesh to heaven! — this is the great wonder of Ascension Day: “our Lord, placed at the right hand of [the Father's] glory our weak human nature, which He had united to Himself.”

So, as we celebrate the Ascension, we are caught up into that longing for heaven. We do not stare, meaninglessly, into the sky, wondering where, and why, Our Lord has gone, but we see that He has actually gone to prepare for us a place. He has gone home to heaven, but with an invitation that we are to follow Him. We can be sure that He means this, since He takes our very flesh into the presence of the Father in heaven. Here are the words of the Ascension-Day Preface, which also give us a great guide to the feast we celebrate: “He ascended, *not* to

distance Himself from our lowly state but that we, His members, might be confident of following where He, our Head and Founder, has gone before.”

So, we not stuck in some paralysis of feeling deprived of the Lord, by His Ascension. Instead, we are galvanized into wanting to get there to be with Him too, in His home — the home that He has invited to make our home too. So, as I said, we don’t stand there staring into the sky, but we are convinced by Jesus to “go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation.” The Good News is that Jesus has opened up His home to us. We do not need to remain outside the Kingdom, homeless. He is calling us, inviting us insistently, into His home. This is the Good News that we are invited to share.

We cannot separate today’s feast from the next feast, that of Pentecost. Without the energy, courage, wisdom and all the gifts that come from God the Holy Spirit, the apostles would not have been able to go out and proclaim the Good News. It is, as it were, that before Pentecost they knew the Gospel in their head, but did not have the heart to

achieve it. With the coming of the Spirit, powerfully, setting them ‘on fire,’ they were able to do all that Jesus had commanded of them as He was about to ascend. And they did so, most effectively. They spread far and wide! Within the lifetimes of the Apostles themselves, the Gospel had got at least as far as Italy in the West, India in the East, and N. Africa in the South. They laid the foundations of the Church, of which we benefit still today. They took the command of the Son of God; and the courage and wisdom of the Spirit, and they ‘ran with it’ to the farthest corners of the known world, so that more and more people might come to hear the invitation of Christ to be at home with Him in the Kingdom of Heaven.

As we celebrate Jesus ascending, today, let’s gaze into heaven, see Our Lord now in glory, beyond the suffering and rejection He experienced here on earth. Let’s be joyful in this homecoming of His, and ask Him fervently to keep us on the way that leads us each to be there too. *Draw us, risen, ascended, glorified Jesus, without faltering, into your heavenly home; draw us happily home.*