

The Festival of The Ascension of Our Lord
26 May, Anno Domini 2022
St. Mark 16:14-20
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

I think we often lose sight of the great importance of Jesus' ascension into heaven to take His seat at the right hand of God. As we suffer through this violent, divisive, dark, and corrupt world, we quite naturally imagine that we would be better off with the pre-cross Jesus, the Jesus that is walking around among us that we can see and touch. That's always what our flesh wants, whatever is most immediate. "Just give me whatever will relieve me of my current suffering and pain and discomfort." But what is immediately gratifying is rarely ever what is best if it's not downright bad. Any sorrow or disappointment at the idea that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father is terribly shortsighted and misguided and misses out on immeasurable comfort, far more than even having Him standing right beside us.

Far from drawing to an end, Jesus' ministry among us reaches its fullest expression by His ascension to the throne of God's power. From there the benefits of His cross are dispersed to the whole world. Notice, Jesus didn't sneak away to some desolate place so that He could hide His ascension and leave the Church in wonder. He made sure the apostles, the eyewitnesses, were there as He went up with a shout and the sound of a trumpet, as the Psalmist sang, so that through the apostolic witness the whole world might be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Our Savior ensured that His victory over death and the evils of this world could be made known to us here and now.

This is a glorious day filled with the greatest comfort for all who feel hopelessly embattled against sin and death, who mourn as yet another person suffering from terrible spiritual and mental darkness felt that the best relief he could find would be to murder his grandmother, young children, and teachers; for all who feel trapped by the pressures and trials of their vocations! For us, Jesus' ascension is filled with the never-ending shout of victory. Your champion is the Lord of heaven and earth who exercises the full power and glory of God as both your brother and your great High Priest. Far from running away, Jesus ascended to where He now fills all things and rules over all things as the victor to whom all authority in heaven and earth has been given. You, today, bear the Name of Christ as a result of the ascension. Without the ascension there would be no Spirit to attend the preaching of the Gospel. Without the ascension, there would be no preaching of the crucified Christ who is Lord and ruler over all things in heaven and on earth.

How terrible it would be if Jesus remained confined to a small portion of the Middle East and the only way to be helped by Him was to travel half-way around the world! Our Lord would have no such thing. He desires to be with His Church wherever she is gathered, bestowing on her the life and salvation He purchased with His Blood, comforting her with the peace that He has made between God and man, whether she is in China or France or Belize or Kenya or Wylie.

By no means should we ever imagine that Jesus went away into heaven, far removed from us as many false teachers would have us believe. What kind of comfort could we possibly have if He did? And what is worse, those who would confine our Lord to heaven would burden us with the impossible task of taking a magical, emotional and mental journey into heaven so that we could be with Him. You are far more precious to Christ than that! As He has always done, your Lord comes to you. He doesn't make you meet Him halfway. He comes the entire way because we can't even take the first step.

It is because of the great burden that you bear, because sorrow has clouded your hearts, that Jesus still comes, not as before (though soon enough He will), but through the precious Means of Grace which He instituted, to which He bound His Word, in which He Himself promises to be present, and gives you eternal life as often as you need it - which, of course, is constantly. Through the Word and Sacraments, Christ comes to breathe the Spirit of life into your tired and aching conscience. By water He washes you clean and makes you God's Child. By absolution He silences the Law's accusations. By bread and wine He feeds you with the sacrifice offered on Calvary's cross, the very Body and Blood that now reign in heaven above. By these gifts you have the certain hope that as He is, one day you to most certainly will be, ascended far out of the reach of sin and death and Satan. He comes to strengthen you with the assurance that your enemies have been cast down from their thrones. You no longer need to fear them because He is Lord, not them.

Now, the Jesus who once veiled His divine majesty, veils it no longer but exercises it fully through His humanity, the humanity which He shares with us. Theologians refer to this as the *genus maiestaticum*, the communication of attributes. By this communication, the divine attributes such as omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence are all utilized through and by the human nature of our Lord, the flesh and blood and bones. Those attributes, of course, don't belong essentially to the human nature, but in Jesus, they are shared in a unique, one-time only but forever way. Jesus is forever the God-man, fully divine and fully human. And while this may just sound like religious hair-splitting, just consider for a moment the great comfort this Biblical teaching means. If, as many believe, the human is not capable of the divine (sometimes expressed as the finite not being capable of the infinite), which logic would seem to demand, then truly, Jesus is trapped in heaven far away from us and can't be with His Church except in one place at a time. But that isn't true! Jesus promised His disciples that He would be with them always, even to the

very end of the age. He was and He still is with His Church because the glory of God is fully at work in and through the flesh of Jesus. If this artificial barrier between Christ's humanity and Christ's divinity were real, how did Jesus, in the flesh, simply appear behind the lock door on Easter evening? And what would the Holy Supper be if the Body and Blood of our Savior which were given and shed for us, weren't actually there? They would be nothing and do nothing. God forbid! But that is not what Jesus said! Very clearly, He says, as we will hear again shortly, "This is My Body; this is My Blood." It is true. The bread is His Body and the wine is His Blood as He promises. They are not symbols or representatives. Scripture clearly teaches the communication of attributes, the *genus maiestaticum*. St. Paul affirms this in His letter to the Corinthians who were treating the Lord's Supper as just plain bread and wine. There, in chapter 10, he writes "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" Paul clearly believes that Jesus, the real body of Jesus, not just some idea of Jesus, is given in the Holy Communion. These things aren't logical, but neither is the incarnation, God assuming human flesh, the fullness of the Godhead dwelling bodily! And what is the Christian faith without the incarnation of God's Son?!

Jesus, the whole Jesus, body and soul, has ascended to the throne of God's glory...for you! Your Lord, your Savior, your brother, your great High Priest has no equal in heaven above or on earth below. ALL of creation is subject to not only His power, but also, and more importantly, to His mercy. Every storm, every disease, every cross, every demon and even death itself must accomplish the merciful purpose of Jesus and His Father to save you. And Jesus is only the first. He led a host of captives in His train, including you. You will follow along with all those who bear His Name, who have been baptized into Jesus. So don't gaze up into heaven trying to find your Savior and the comfort you long for. He is here, Body and Blood, water and Word, for you. Alleluia, indeed!

In the Name of +Jesus.

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Pastor Ulmer