

Ascension Yr A Thursday 8.00am (Streamed in Lockdown) FOR WEBSITE
Acts 1:1-11. Ps 47:2-3,6-9. Yr A Eph 1:17-23, or Yr B Eph 4:1-13. Matt 28:16-20.
C/W Acts 1:1-11. Ps47. Eph 1:15-23. Luke 24:44-53

The glorious Feast of the Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ is a celebration of the fact that Jesus as God, took back into the heart of the godhead, his humanity and ours, Body, Soul, Blood and in his case, Divinity.

This is the sure and certain sign that not only Spirit but our human bodies, transfigured and glorified have their final destiny in that greater, **supernatural** dimension of reality called Heaven.

Jesus probably did not go UP vertically. In one of my favourite places on earth, the Shrine at Walsingham, there is a chapel of the Ascension where a pair of feet protrude from the ceiling!

We have to remember that is 1930s religiosity. If that type of image is helpful to some people, as a famous Bishop recently said, “who am I to judge?”

Thinking of Walsingham, most of you will have heard that Fr (Canon) Beau Brandie went to his Heavenly reward yesterday after a long illness. He was such a great character, always at the forefront of proclaiming the catholic faith as received by the Church of England and a fantastic supporter and pilgrim of the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. He lived life to the full and now lives in the fullest in the light of the Lord.

But rather than going UP, Jesus went THROUGH, taking the **physical** into the **numinous**. When looking for the infinite through the finite, the natural human aspiration is ‘upwards’ - away from the Earth. In the book of the Acts of the Apostles we are told that a cloud received him out of the Apostles sight. Throughout the Old Testament the Cloud is used as a metaphor for the physical presence of God.

Sometimes I wonder if we are trying to be too clever in analysing the exact “How” of these mysteries. By intellectualising them we might lose something of the wonder, yet simplicity of the old images.

If you are convinced deep within, of the word for word literalist translation of our English Bibles, then the images of ‘Ascend’, ‘Up’, ‘Into the cloud’ are perfectly acceptable and express the nub of the mystery.

I am not recommending a relativist view here, in other words, “what is true for **you** is your truth” – “what is true for **me** is my truth”. There cannot be two truths – either something is true or not true, which means, false!

Christian iconography, art and statuary of the Ascension, including our own beautiful figure on the west wall, are not false or illusory, they are representations of a physical and spiritual event beyond our understanding.

We were not eyewitnesses; and the biblical accounts are an attempt to express the inexpressible. So long as your vision of the mystery of the Ascension draws you closer to experiencing the glory of God, and the love of neighbour, then hold on to it.

By Jesus going to the bosom of His Father, **we** were going to receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Ascension of Jesus to the heart of Godhead means that the Holy Spirit is now free to be outpoured at Pentecost:

Outpoured not just on the selected few as in olden times like Abraham, Moses, the prophets and other specific people - Our Lady Mary, St Elizabeth and John the Baptist. But The Holy Spirit was outpoured at Pentecost to all who believe in Jesus.

Our friendship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit means that our friend now abides in our soul, in our heart, never to be parted from us.

Do we realise that immense power of the Holy Spirit who now dwells within us, bringing the Father and Jesus Himself? Just think of that power in the creation of galaxies and the universe. That power, that Spirit, now resides in us.

So Jesus has not gone far! Heaven is all around us! He is in the Eucharist - absolutely and directly Jesus! In the Eucharist we have a physical presence of Jesus as tangible by faith as the Disciples enjoyed when they lived with Him in Palestine.

Jesus is spiritually in the Word, the Bible, when proclaimed by our readers in the Eucharist; through the power of the Holy Spirit he is with us spiritually when two or three are gathered in His Name; Through that same Holy Spirit He dwells spiritually within our inmost being, our so called 'hearts'.

That means we meet Jesus in one another especially if they are fully "In Christ"! But we also meet Him to an extent in every human being, of all faiths and none. Jesus said *'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'*

St. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in 2nd century said ***"Man fully alive is the Glory of God"***. and C.S. Lewis wrote ***"It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare"***.

CS Lewis also wrote : ***"All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations- these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is Immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendours."*** *I doubt if there will many of the former!*

Sometimes Jesus presence is obscured to our senses by our perception of what surrounds that presence - whether human bodily distraction, idiosyncrasies or circumstance that can

cloud our vision. His presence can be more particular or more discernible. But in the Eucharist, the conveyance is simple – for Jesus simply said, “This is my body, this is my blood.

In any event, Heaven is nearer to us than we are to ourselves. We know this by our friendship with the Saints; our real experience of the communion of saints. We must not think of Heaven geographically. It is all around us.

When Jesus became a man, he didn't stop being God! He was still with God the Father – He didn't stop being the Son of God, the Second person of the Blessed Trinity. He emptied Himself of the dignity of pure God-head and took on our own human limitations - but He was still God.

If he had stopped being God, being of the Holy Trinity, God's Eternal Word - creation would have snuffed out like a candle. The whole of creation and existence is sustained by the Holy Trinity.

No, the glory of Heaven is very close to each and every one of us and we have one foot in it already. That is what the Ascension is all about. Jesus took his full and glorified humanity, Body Soul, Blood and Divinity right into the heart of the Godhead, with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Let us seek with all our hearts to bring our brothers and sisters to a knowledge of our Risen, Glorified and Ascended Lord – so that they may know His Glory too.

“Renew Your wonders in this our day, as by a new Pentecost. Grant to Your Church that, being of one mind and steadfast in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and following the lead of blessed Peter, it may advance the reign of our Divine Saviour, the reign of truth and justice, the reign of love and peace. Amen.”

(St. Pope John XXIII prayed in 1962 for “a new Pentecost”. In preparation for the Second Vatican Council)