

Pastor's letter

May 24, 2009

Ascension Of The Lord

Dear parishioner,

With the feast of the Ascension we are close to the conclusion of the Easter season.

During this Easter period of forty days, Jesus manifested Himself to His disciples by giving them His last teachings and completing His mission on earth. On Ascension Day we celebrate Jesus appearing to His disciples for the last time, before returning to His natural and Trinitarian dimension.

But what does Ascension mean? Simply, that Jesus returned to His divine dimension, to sit together with His Father and the Holy Spirit. St. Paul in the letter to the Ephesians is very clear: "*When it says, 'he went up', it must mean that he had gone down to the deepest levels of the earth.*" (Ephesians 4: 9)

In this letter, before we touch upon the invitation from Jesus to be missionaries, I would like to consider the historical aspect of the Ascension that Saint Luke, author of the Acts of the Apostles described in a detailed manner.

The Ascension of Jesus, before being exclusively considered as a theological issue, must be visualized in an historical way. In my opinion, historical documentation provides us with the certainty and the basis for our faith.

For certain these two pages cannot give exhaustive historical information, but I would want to invite you do not skip this important aspect. Luke, the writer of the Acts of the Apostles and author of one of the three synoptic Gospels, writes history.

Luke was not one of the first disciples of Jesus but a Christian of the second generation. The tradition affirms that he was a physician and a man of great knowledge and culture. After having converted from paganism to Christianity, Luke became a disciple of the apostles and from the narrations of those who had had known Jesus, he derived his Gospel. He is also the author of the Acts of the Apostles, which describes the Ascension of Jesus, the beginnings of the first Christian community and also transmits the message of the Church by Jesus' Apostles. Luke is therefore a historian, a researcher, and a man who reports historical events delivered to him by live witnesses.

I know that sometimes people like to diminish and ridicule the story of Jesus as it was handed down by the evangelists. But I ask myself, "What interest could those people have had to preach the message of Christ, when it was more simple if they just gone about their business?"

The story of the Ascension points to a very interesting fact. The angels reproach the disciples for standing still while looking at Jesus who climbs to the sky: "*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?*" (Acts 1: 11)

Thus begins the time of the Church. The Church must pick up the message of Christ, and bring it to the world. It's as if Jesus removes Himself from the scene, puts Himself on the side, and says: "Now it's your turn! I have done my part, now let me see what are you able to do!"

With the Ascension of the Lord, it is the ending of the presence of Jesus on earth in a physical way and the beginning of His Church, the new way in which the presence of Jesus continues on earth.

Jesus did climb to heaven, but he also sent forth his disciples to continue His mission of Love and Salvation.

At the beginning of this Sunday's Gospel Jesus gave His disciples a mission: "*Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.*" (Mark, 16: 15)

Today too, we are invited by God to let the people we meet know the love of God. I want to underline that such an invitation is not only addressed to the Pope, to the bishops, priests and nuns, but to all Christians.

Jesus said: "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.*" (Acts 1: 8)

Personally I firmly believe in the presence of the Holy Spirit inside each one of us. A presence that doesn't limit Himself to some sporadic demonstrations, but whose presence is constant, every moment of our life, from birth to the time of our death.

The problem is only a matter of choice: "Do I listen to Him or not?" It seems strange but it all boils down to a matter of "listening." The clearest test of the Holy Spirit inside of us is when we choose our actions for the good of another person.

This is the Holy Spirit, the presence of God in my good choice for others.

You see, the mission that we have as Christians and as Church is both beautiful and great. Our life fills with deep satisfaction, when we are able to do good without self-interest. But so many times the beauty of goodness and personal satisfaction are overshadowed by the poverty of our human limits, within us and in our everyday surroundings.

If we really believe in the pleasure that we receive in doing good for others, it is necessary to believe and to make use of what is already inside of us- the promise of Jesus: "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.*"

In the beginning of the letter I tried to describe what the Ascension meant for Jesus.

No less, the ascension of the human being also exists.

In my small experience as man and priest I have had some moments when I really felt I was living the human ascension and felt I "ascended" with Christ. Then, I succeeded living the Word of God. I felt a more direct connection to a greater destiny that went beyond everything that surrounded me. A greater destiny, that in the moments of opening up and doing good to and for others I feel, belongs to me.

Peace, Father Luciano