

SOLEMNITY OF THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

St. Luke 24:46-53

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord. Traditionally this solemnity would have been celebrated last Thursday for that was the fortieth day since the Lord's resurrection from the dead.

The number forty is one of the great mythical numbers of the Bible and Tradition. During the great flood it rained for forty days and forty nights before Noah and his ark were led to dry land. The Hebrews travelled for forty years in the wilderness before reaching the promised land. The Lord spent forty days in the desert preparing for His public work, from where we get the forty days of Lent preparing for Easter. And the Lord spent forty hours in the tomb from His burial to His resurrection. Forty is a number whose meaning is important because it reminds us of our redemption, but redemption that is born of suffering but finds its fulfillment in joy. The forty days and nights that Noah and his family suffered on the ark gave way to a renewed earth. The forty years that the Hebrews suffered on the Sinai peninsula led them to the land of milk and honey granted to them by God. The forty days of the Lord in the desert found their end in Our Lord's proclamation that the Kingdom of God was at hand. The forty hours of burial in the tomb gave way to the resurrection and the glorified life of Christ. And the forty days from the resurrection, whilst the Lord remained on earth, appearing to the Apostles and disciples, gave way to the greater glory of His ascension from this world to heaven.

You may remember a film called "Forrest Gump." At one point in the movie, when Forest is feeling rejected by the people he loves, he gets an urge to just start running. So he walks out the door, jogs across the yard, and doesn't

stop. When he gets to the ocean and runs out of road, he just turns around and runs the other way. Throughout his run, he is filmed for the national news. When asked why he's running—"World peace? Women's rights?"—he answers, "I'm just running." Unintentionally, he sparks a nationwide following, whose run ends in the middle of the desert. Forrest stops, longhaired and long bearded, and turns around. The handful of joggers who have followed him wait in anticipation, "Quiet, he's 'gonna say something." "I'm kinda' tired," he says, "I think I'll go home now." Forrest walks through the small and silent crowd, and one of them yells after him, "Well, what are we supposed to do?"

This is like St. Mary Magdalene at the tomb when she first sees the Lord after His resurrection. Her desire to run to Him and hold Him is met with His refusal, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene is trying to recapture the past, something that has already been and now gone, to regain the relationship that she once has with Our Lord. But He says she mustn't look to what has been, for in and through the Cross Our Lord has revealed God and brought to fulfillment the task given to Him. The disciples are yet to experience the fruits of Our Lord's glory, but the days of being associated with Our Lord on earth are over. An entirely new world is being established through the hour that is in progress. In the Gospel of St. John, Our Lord only ever referred to God as His Father, only He was the son of God. Now, however, in His ascension to the Father His Father becomes our Father, and His God is our God.

The mission of Christ, the Son of God who descended from heaven led to His passion and His being lifted up on the Cross. His going down into the tomb gave way to His rising up from the dead, and now His ascension into heaven and return to the Father.

Our lives are dominated by ups and downs, by good times and bad, by comings and goings. We see the Mass as the source and summit of our faith, the

point to which we go and the place from where we go. Because of the fall of Adam and Eve we were no longer able to reach up to heaven so the Lord reached down to us and caught us up in His love so that He can draw us back up to heaven.

Just as Forrest Gump left his followers with the question, “what are we supposed to do now?,” we might feel that we have been abandoned by the Lord. What are we supposed to do? Well, admit that there are ups and downs in our lives, but just as the flood gave way to a renewed earth, just as the Hebrews’ wanderings in the desert gave way to a new land, just as the forty hours in the tomb gave way to the resurrection, that suffering is no longer an end in itself, but a means to an end. And even though Forrest Gump left his followers, we know that the ascension is not the last event in Christ’s life, for He said, “[you] will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”