

SOLEMNITY OF THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

St. Mark 16:15-20

Forty days ago we celebrated the Resurrection of Our Lord from the dead. This was following forty days of preparation for that day, which we call Lent. Today, forty days after the Resurrection we celebrate the Ascension of Our Lord into heaven.

The number forty is a number meaning preparation. A time to prepare ourselves for something so much greater to come. At the time of Noah, rains flooded the earth for forty days and forty nights, purifying the world of sin and preparing those who remained faithful for a new world. After being freed from slavery in Egypt, the Hebrew people wandered for forty years in the desert as they were prepared by God to enter the Promised Land. For forty days Moses remained on Mount Sinai as he was prepared so that he may receive the law of God. For forty days Our Lord was alone in the wilderness as He prepared to begin His public ministry. For forty hours Our Lord lay in the tomb after His Passion and Death and before His Resurrection. Then for forty days after His Resurrection, Our Lord remained on earth appearing to the Apostles and many hundreds of the disciples. But in this case, these forty days were not a time for Our Lord to prepare, but for His Apostles and disciples to prepare. For after these forty days He would ascend into Heaven and no longer remain with them on earth.

But though Our Lord is no longer here on earth as He was before, He is not gone. He is still here, as He always has been, in the Blessed Sacrament. It is why the disciples on the road to Emmaus, shortly after the Resurrection did not recognise Jesus as He walked beside them but only saw who He was “in the breaking of the bread” (see *Lk. 24:30-31*). Our Lord showed them, and us, that if we are to look for Him, we must look for Him in the Eucharist, because that is where He is.

The Ascension of Our Lord should remind us that we are supposed to always be moving upwards, ever closer to God, ever closer to the fulfillment of our humanity which has been shown us in Christ. We are not made for the gutter, we are not made to tear down heaven and make of it what we decide it should be. But we see this all the time. Those who choose between this part of the faith and that, taking this part because they like it but rejecting that part because it doesn't suit them. Like those who only attend Mass now and then because the command of God to keep holy the Sabbath doesn't suit them yet they still presume that they are at rights with God. Or those who claim they are Catholic but abuse the Sacraments by only bothering with the Church when its time for a Baptism or a wedding. Or those who claim to be faithful but pick and choose between the Church's teachings on abortion or euthanasia or marriage to suit what they think or what the world thinks. This is what is commonly called "cafeteria Catholicism"—picking and choosing between what we like and we don't like. The thing is, however, is that none of us gets to decide the Truth. God is Truth and God is unchangeable. In His Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, He has revealed to us the fullness of Truth. That is because Truth is a person. Truth is Jesus Christ (see *Jn. 1:17*).

Don't tear God down from heaven to make room for yourself. God Himself has already come down from heaven so that He can carry you back with Him. Surrender yourself to Him and let yourself be taken in His arms so that He can carry you up with Him.

Remember that the Passion, Death, Resurrection and now the Ascension of Our Lord is not a guarantee for us of heaven, but instead opens up for us the possibility of heaven. The gates of heaven closed with the pride of Man with the sin of Adam and Eve have now been opened by the humility of Jesus Christ, Our Lord. And the path that He has tread is the path that He has laid out for us to follow. Pride threw Adam and Eve downwards, humility carried Our Lord upwards. It is when we bow low, when we act with humility, placing our lives

within the teachings of the Church, because we understand that it is not her own teaching but “the word of God which she has received in faith” (*Fides et ratio*, n. 7). It is when we bow low and seek to serve others, bowing ourselves to their feet just as did Our Lord when He bowed low to wash the feet of His Apostles at the Last Supper. It is when we bow low and recognise our sinfulness and that it is only by the mercy of God that we can become who He has always wanted us to be. It is only when we bow low that we will ever have the chance of being taken upwards with Our Lord.

Just like Noah in the flood, just like the Hebrews in the desert, just like Moses on Mount Sinai, our lives on earth—however many years we may live—are our own forty days of preparation for something which is far greater than we know.

If we think we can save ourselves, then we are damned for eternity because we have failed to see that we are not owed heaven but that it is opened up for us if only we will try to find our way there. So never say God has abandoned me if you have abandoned God and cannot give Him even an hour a week in Mass. Never say God never hears me if you will never give Him the chance to speak. Never say that God understands my good intentions if you have never bothered to understand what He has taught and His intentions for you. Our Lord has not gone from us. He is with us but in a different way. A way that means we must not look with our eyes but with our faith. We will find Him when we abandon ourselves to Him in the mystery of the holy sacrifice of the Mass. We will find Him when we adore Him—Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity—in the Blessed Sacrament. We will find Him when we submit ourselves to Truth and seek to live what He has taught, however difficult that may be. And if we do these things, then by His grace, we will find ourselves with Him, one day, in Heaven.