

I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God. -John 20:17

Deeper meaning of the Ascension

Our Cistercian Fathers had an affinity for certain liturgical feasts of the Church year. The Ascension of the Lord is one of these mysteries they sought to unfold in their prayer, sermons, and writing. At first glance, this seems odd. The Ascension marks the end of Jesus' earthly life; would this not be a reason for grief and sorrow instead of celebration? How are we to understand that the Apostles *returned to Jerusalem with great joy*¹ and Our Lord's words: *it is better for you that I go*²? How could St Bernard claim: *If we observed the feasts of Christmas and Easter with all due devotion, no less devoutly ought we to keep today's festival in honor of the Ascension. For this falls short in no respect of those other solemnities, but is rather their crown and consummation*³?

Great Commission

While there are many aspects to this mystery of our faith, three in particular are important to highlight. First, at the Ascension Jesus extends His own mission to the infant Church: *as the father has sent me, so I send you*⁴. The redemption Christ won for us will now be extended to the whole human family through the mission of His Church. Thankfully, along with the 'Great Commission' Jesus assures the disciples of divine assistance: *you will be clothed with power from on high*⁵.

Decent of the Holy Spirit

In the economy of salvation, the Decent of the Holy Spirit follows organically from the Ascension of the Lord. Many Church Fathers have given various reasons for this necessary sequence. St Bernard interprets Christ's words on the Paraclete thus: *Unless my sensible presence is withdrawn from you, your minds, thus preoccupied, cannot give admission to the fullness of heavenly grace, your souls cannot receive nor your hearts contain it.*⁶ The Cistercian Fathers also playfully wondered if the Holy Spirit first had to 'practice' on Christ's humanity to learn how to play on the harp of the human soul.

Sacred Humanity

St Aelred proclaimed: *Our Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins and he rose for our justification and he ascended into heaven for our glorification. Therefore, we ought to celebrate this day with great joy because there can be no greater glorification of the human person than what has been shown us today.*⁷ The profound humility of God to become man in the Incarnation is something to marvel at. It's a further mystery of His humility that Christ chose to retain His Humanity and gather it into the Godhead for all eternity.

It is the Ascension of Jesus that completes his work of redemption and opens heaven to believers. It is through the Sacred Humanity of Jesus that we can hope for union with the Blessed Trinity; we have confidence that Christ's members will follow Him to glory, where He is preparing a place for us. Jesus now sits at the right hand of God as High Priest, interceding for us as true mediator between God and Man.⁸

St John Damascene explains: *By 'the Father's right hand' we understand the glory and honor of the Divinity, where he who exists as Son of God before all ages, indeed as God, of one being with the Father, is seated bodily after he became incarnate and his flesh was glorified.*⁹ What a great mystery we contemplate in the Solemnity of the Ascension - humanity is now indivisibly joined to divinity and the way to heaven opened. As Our Savior assures us: *I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be.*¹⁰

*Today your High Priest has entered the sanctuary;
the ransom he has won lasts forever.
There he appears in God's sight on your behalf.
To his cry: Lift up your hearts,
reply in all sincerity: we lift them up to the Lord.
-Blessed Guerric of Igny, Sermon for the Ascension*

1 Luke 24:52; 2 John 16:7; 3 St Bernard of Clairvaux, Fourth Sermon for the Ascension; 4 John 20:21; 5 Luke 24:49 6 St Bernard of Clairvaux, Fifth Sermon for the Ascension; 7 St Aelred of Rievaulx, Sermon for the Ascension; 8 See Hebrews chapters 5-10; 9 St John Damascene Exposition of the Orthodox Faith; 10 John 14:3

*They all joined together constantly in prayer,
along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus.*

-Acts 1:14

Pentecost Novena May 19-27

In Acts chapter one we read how after the Ascension of the Lord the Apostles returned to Jerusalem, and gathering in the upper-room with the holy woman and Mary, they awaited the coming Holy Spirit with nine days of expectant prayer. The Church has continued this yearly observance of the Pentecost Novena.

These days of prayer are always a special time in the life of our community. We invite you to join with us in prayer during the Pentecost Novena, praying in particular for these intentions: For a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit on our Church and on our world, for the Spirit's guidance in all aspects of the New Monastery project, and for the funds to successfully complete the construction.

Let us gather around Mary as the Apostles did, uniting our prayers with that of the whole Church. Each day of the Novena (the days between Ascension Thursday and Pentecost Sunday) let us pray this traditional prayer of the Church:

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful
and kindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created,
and you shall renew the face of the earth.*

Let us pray.

*O God, who have taught the hearts of the faithful
by the light of the Holy Spirit,
grant that in the same Spirit we may be truly wise
and ever rejoice in his consolation.*

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Find construction updates and photos on our news page: build.valleyofourlady.org/news/

