

Ascension of the Lord – Monastery Valley of Our Lady, Wisconsin, 14.05.2015

Readings: Acts 1,1-11; Ephesians 4,1-13; Mark 16,15-20

“Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky?” (At 1,11)

The angels of the Ascension, like those who appeared in the empty tomb on Easter morning, are experts in correcting the direction of the gaze of the disciples, the direction of their search for the Lord. They are like the guards at the airport, who help the passengers not to get lost in their search for the right point from which to continue their journey toward the right destination.

As they carry out their task, however, the angels in the texts of St. Luke have the particularity of indicating the right direction by asking a question: on Easter morning they ask, “Why do you seek the living one among the dead?” (Lk 24,5). And after the Ascension of the Lord: “Why are you standing there looking at the sky?” (At 1,11).

The angels love to provoke in us a reflection on the instinctive way in which we often try to seek and find the Lord. They invite us to seek Jesus by meditating on his mystery, with eyes of faith, and by listening to the Gospel. What we see with our eyes of flesh is not enough; it does not allow us to see the whole mystery of Christ. Faith permits us to look beyond the empty tomb in order to “see” that Christ is risen from the dead, and beyond the clouds of heaven in order to “see” the new and definitive presence of Christ next to the Father and with us. If we look at only the clouds, we do not see that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, and above all we do not see that he remains alive and working in our midst, in us and through us. The Gospel of Mark, which we have just heard, says it well: “So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.” (Mc 16,19-20).

Next to the Father and working together with the disciples: behold the new presence of Christ, behold what the clouds hide from us if we do not think about the Ascension with eyes of faith. The angels provoke the disciples with their question because Jesus had spoken about all this with them on the night of the Last Supper and certainly during the forty days in which he remained with them after the Resurrection. Whoever listens attentively to the Lord receives eyes to see the invisible, to see the reality of his presence beyond appearances and in the depths of reality.

We have heard St. Paul saying to the Ephesians: “The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.” (Ef 4,10).

Faith contemplates this fullness of Christ in the whole of reality. The mystery of Jesus Christ died and risen fills everything with meaning, truth and beauty, beginning with our own lives.

This fullness stands in the fact that Jesus is present in the world as the Son who sits at the right hand of the Father. In this way he fills all things, and, above all, all human beings and all human relationships, with the absolute fullness that is the love between Father and Son, that is, the Holy Spirit. The fullness of communion between Father and Son becomes the fullness of the whole of reality.

At this point we understand that the Ascension is fulfilled in Pentecost. The gift of the Spirit to the Church, and through the Church to the whole world, is not a gift which replaces the gift of the Son. It is rather the gift which permits the Son to communicate to us the gift of the Father, the gift of his communion with the Father. And the nearer Jesus is to the Father, the greater is the fullness of his presence with us. The fullness of the gift of the Son to us is the gift of the fullness of the Son to the Church, and the fullness of the Son is communion with the Father – it is the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the fullness of everything, because by dying, rising and ascending into Heaven he can communicate to us through the Holy Spirit his fullness as the Son seated at the right hand of the Father.

This fullness penetrates the whole life of the Church, in the sacraments and in the charisms distributed to each one of her members. As St. Paul says with his theology of the mystical Body, “And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ” (Ef 4,11-13).

If often we live poorly, without passion, without joy and without generosity the task entrusted to us as members of the Body of the Church, it is because we are not looking with faith at the great mystery which involves us, even when the task entrusted to us is the most humble and hidden. In the whole Body of Christ, which is the Church, it is always the fullness of the Son next to the Father in the love of the Holy Spirit who flows, who warms and who gives life like blood in the veins.

Often, however, we look at the Church like the disciples who were looking at the clouds. We consider Jesus as lost instead of recognizing his even greater presence in us and among us, instead of recognizing him fully present in the communion which binds us in the Church and in the service which is entrusted to us and in which is given to us the power to obey the will of the Father like the Son, in the Son, with the love of the Spirit.

The Ascension is thus a feast which calls us to contemplate Jesus there where he truly is, there where he is in the love of the Father and in the fraternal love which he gives us and which he asks of us. The Ascension sends us to contemplate Christ in the Church, in the brothers and sisters with whom we live, and in the immense work of salvation which Jesus wants to accomplish together with us by giving us the Spirit who animates and unites his Body, which is the Church.

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