

The Rev. Daren J. Zehnle  
St. Anthony of Padua Parish, Effingham, Illinois  
28 May 2006

The Ascension of the Lord (B)

When Christ the Lord took on flesh and was born in Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary he took upon himself our humanity together with his divinity. He lived among us and taught us the way to the Father as he made the difficult and agonizing journey to Jerusalem. All the while his divinity remained veiled. The veil over his divinity was pulled back, as it were - his divinity was revealed - when he healed the sick; when he cast out demons; when he raised the dead; or when he multiplied the loaves and the fishes, but his divinity was not seen by all, nor was it seen all of the time.

When the all-powerful God chose to come be with us he did not come with the blare of trumpets or the march of armies. He did not come as he deserved; rather he chose the way of poverty and humility, all to reveal to us the awesome power of his love. He came among us so quietly that he almost came unnoticed.

In his death on the Cross, we see the fullness of his humanity and the depth of his great love for us. In his Resurrection from the dead we begin to see more of his divinity, but at the same time we see his humanity given greater glory as he stayed among these past forty days. In his resurrection, he

reveals more of his majesty to us, but in his ascension into heaven we behold the fullness of his divinity.

Pope Benedict XVI, in reflecting upon the meaning of Jesus' ascension into glory, reminds us:

The meaning of this last gesture of Jesus is twofold. Above all, ascending on "high," he unequivocally reveals his divinity: He returns to where he came from, that is, to God, after having fulfilled his mission on earth. Moreover, Christ ascends to heaven with the humanity he had assumed and which has resurrected from the dead: That humanity is ours, transfigured, divinized, made eternal. The Ascension, therefore, reveals the "supreme vocation" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22) of every human person - called to the eternal life of the kingdom of God, kingdom of love, light and peace (Pope Benedict XVI, Regina Caeli Address, 21 May 2006).

But how do we enter into this kingdom?

After the Last Supper Jesus said to the Apostles, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. Where [I] am going you know the way" (John 14:2-3). Today he says this to each of us as well. Having ascended to the Father he prepares a place for us, but we must seek to follow after him. We must desire to be where he is. He will not force us to be with him;

we must desire it and we must have faith in him. We must implore for the gift of this faith.

To this statement of Jesus Thomas demanded, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" (John 14:5). Do we not say the same to Jesus: "Lord, where have you gone? Why have you left us?" Jesus answers this question, which we all pose to him, saying, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). He has not abandoned us; rather, he is our hope, for he shows us the way to the Father.

After watching in bewilderment Jesus ascend to the Father, the Apostles continued "looking intently at the sky" (Acts 1:10) and "standing there looking at the sky" (Acts 1:11). It is as though they stand there asking again with Thomas, "Master, how can we know the way?" They see Jesus ascend in his glory. They know where he has gone but they do not know quite how to get there, they do not quite know how to follow him.

To their wonderment, the two men told them how to follow after Jesus: "This Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven" (Acts 1:11). "He has not abandoned you; he will come back for you when all is ready."

The way to heaven, the way to the Father, the way to eternal life is no thing, it is a person; the way is Jesus

Christ! Knowledge of the Savior and a mature faith in him is the way to heaven, is the way to follow him; in short, what is needed is a faithful relationship with Christ Jesus, nothing more, nothing less. We are reminded again of the Holy Father's words: "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice of a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 1).

Today we witness where Jesus has gone. This is the new horizon we are given and the decisive direction. Our new horizon, our decisive direction, is the ascension of the Lord. We see him "lifted up" (Acts 1:9) into heaven and we know that today "God mounts his throne amid shouts of joy; the LORD amid trumpet blasts" (Psalm 47:6).

"We rejoice that Christ our savior has taken his place at the right hand of the Father, because where he has gone, we hope to follow" (Pope Benedict XVI, Regina Caeli Address, 21 May 2006).

Let us then not be found staring into the sky wondering where it is that Jesus has gone and pondering how it is that we are to follow. No, we know the Way! The Way knows us and loves us and calls us to himself. Let us then yield to the power of his love. Let us embrace the power of the Cross and resurrection so that when he comes again with the angels and the

saints we may be found worthy to share with him eternal glory.

Amen.