

The Ascension

Today we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord. Jesus is taken up into heaven while several of His disciples look on (see Lk 24:51; Acts 1:9). This is not an event that should not be passed by without much notice (which is why the Bishops moved it to Sunday so that more people will get to celebrate this great event in salvation history). The Ascension of Jesus into heaven is also humanity's ascension into heaven. Jesus not only opened the door to heaven for us, but He also carried humanity in with Himself.

As it states in the second reading from the letter to the Hebrews. "Since through the blood of Jesus we have confidence of entrance into the sanctuary by the new and living way he opened for us through the veil, that is, his flesh." (see Heb 10:19-20) Some of you may recognize an allusion to the veil, or curtain, that was in front of the Holy of Holies in the Temple. The veil separated the people from the Holy of Holies, which is where the Ark of the Covenant was. The Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies represented God's presence among His people in the Temple. (see 1 Kings 8) Only the high priest was allowed to enter into the Holy of Holies, and he was only allowed to enter there once a year on the Day of Atonement (see Lev 16:1-18).

When Jesus died on the cross the soldier pierced His heart with the lance. It was at that moment that the veil was torn in two¹. It is through the heart of Jesus, and His sacrifice of total self-giving love that we have access to the Father. Jesus did for us what we were incapable of doing for ourselves. We also heard about this in the second reading. "For Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands, a copy of the true one, but heaven itself, that he might now appear before God on our behalf." (see Heb 9:24) The veil tearing in two represented that God had accepted the perfect sacrifice of His Son, and now the people had access to the Holy of Holies once again. This was the access to God that was lost when Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit, and they were cast out of the garden of Eden and not allowed back in (see Gen 3). Jesus corrected, or healed, the division and separation that was caused by Adam and Eve. The Ascension of Jesus into heaven paved the way back to our heavenly Father.

It is the love of God – Father, Son, & the Holy Spirit which accomplished all of this. It is through the love of God that we are drawn up, become one with them in their love, and are lifted up to the heights of heaven. For those that love Jesus, we are drawn up into the Holy of Holies of heaven.

As we will pray in the Preface (1) just before the Eucharistic prayer later in this Mass, "For the Lord Jesus, the King of glory, conqueror of sin and death, ascended to the highest heavens, as the Angels gazed in wonder. Mediator between God and man, judge of the world and Lord of hosts, he ascended, not to distance himself from our lowly state but that we, his members, might be confident of following where he, our Head and Founder, has gone before."

The Eucharist that we share at every Mass is a foretaste of the divine life that we will experience in heaven. God willing we all make it to heaven. We have access now to the divine life of God through the Body and Blood of Jesus that we receive in communion. Jesus is continuing to draw us closer to our heavenly Father by helping us grow in holiness. Our devotions, our prayer life, our reception of the sacraments all help prepare us for the next life when Jesus will bring us into the presence of our heavenly Father. This is why God created us, to be with Him forever in heaven. This is what Jesus will accomplish for those that remain in His love and seek Him out with all their hearts (see Jn 15:1-17). Let Jesus accomplish this, and He will draw everyone to Himself into the joy of heaven.

¹ See Mt 27:51; Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45. Matthew, Mark, & Luke mention the veil being torn. Only in Jn 19:34 is it mentioned that Jesus was pierced by a soldier's lance. John does not mention the veil being torn.