

Ascension Sunday, 2008

“Before all things have a constant mutual charity among yourselves for charity covereth a multitude of sins.”

(1 Pet 4:8)

For several Sundays past the Gospels have reminded us of Jesus' promise to His apostles at the Last Supper: He would not leave them orphans, but would send them the Holy Spirit as a second self to replace Him at their side until He returned. The Church knows what the presence of the Holy Spirit means to her and to the faithful; as she waits for our Lord's glorious return she continuously calls upon the assistance of the Paraclete, her defender, her consoler and her support. “Ascending above the clouds I go to My Father, but when the trumpet sounds on the Last-day I shall return on the clouds of heaven to judge the world;” that is to reward the good and condemn the evil — to show His triumph over sin and death and hell. For all of us there is to be a time of waiting either here or in eternity; a time when the prayer must be in our hearts: “Thy face, O Lord, I will seek; turn not away Thy Face from me.” Let us recall Pope St Leo in his homily on the feast of Ascension Thursday:



Since then, the Ascension of Christ is also our exaltation, for there is hope that the body will be summoned whither the Head has preceded in glory — let us dearest brethren, give worthy expression to our exceedingly great joy and be glad in fervent thanksgiving. For today we have not only been confirmed as possessors of Paradise, but in Christ we have pierced through to the very heights of heaven.

These are his thoughts on this glorious mystery whereby in Christ, who was truly man, human nature was lifted up and exalted above the dignity of all heavenly creation; passing above the hierarchies of Angels, elevated above the heights of Archangels; not suffering any limit or delay in its ascent through the heavenly heights till, having received a seat by the eternal Father, it was joined to the glory of His throne to whose nature it was united in the “Word”.

It was most comforting to see that the Cathedrals across America were filled to capacity in celebrating Ascension Thursday; as were many churches. On television I witnessed the solemn Pontifical ceremonies in the Cathedral at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I learned too that the churches in Scotland celebrated the feast with full

congregations. The importance of Ascension Thursday seems to have been forgotten here in Ireland.

Let us examine our approach to this Holy Sacrifice: We begin by declaring: “I will go unto the Altar of God” and a little later we pray “O send out Thy light and Thy truth: they have led me and brought me to Thy holy hill, even unto Thy tabernacles.” And we repeat: “Then I will go unto the altar of God, unto God who giveth joy to my youth.” After further praise of the Lord, we repeat again, “I will go unto the Altar of God,” and after calling upon God’s help we bend low and unite ourselves with God and the whole court of heaven as we confess our sinfulness.

Do we realise that throughout the Mass we are one with Christ and all the Saints and angels of heaven — celebrating the one great Sacrifice through which all mankind may find remission of sins. Later, as the priest bows low he prays: “Receive, O holy Trinity, this oblation which we make to you in remembrance of the Passion, Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And in every preface of the Mass, as we realise the great act of worship by the angels and saints in the great hymn of praise, we pray that our voices, too, may be joined with theirs as we sing with humble praise, “Holy, Holy, Holy.” If only we made ourselves continually aware of our part in this great Sacrifice, we should receive great increase of blessings for our selves and our families.

In this month which we call the Month of Mary, when we do our best to rejoice in crowning the image of our heavenly Queen, here are a few thoughts from Pope John Paul II:

Mary lived with her eyes fixed on Christ, treasuring His every word: “She kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.” The memories of Jesus, impressed upon her heart, were always with her, leading her to reflect on the various moments of her life at her Son’s side. In a way those memories were to be the “rosary” which she recited uninterruptedly throughout her earthly life.

Let us give more time to praying the Rosary in our homes; and make this month of May truly our month of Mary.

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