

Feast of the Ascension

May 21, 2020

by

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There is no other feast in the Liturgical Year that is more important yet less emphasized than the Ascension. Many of us do not grasp the importance of this event. Jesus had risen from the dead and, according to the Acts of the Apostles, had appeared for forty days. We celebrate Easter so well that we tend to forget that most of Jesus' appearances after His resurrection were marked by fear. Jesus had to continually remind the Apostles "Do not be afraid." Throughout those forty days Jesus continued to teach His Apostles about the reign of God. Even after His resurrection, however, they still did not grasp what He was trying to teach. The Acts of the Apostles tells us that, although the Apostles had begun to believe that Jesus had truly risen from the dead, it was not until He was taken up that they began to understand.

The Ascension marks the end of Jesus' earthly human existence and begins His new role at the right hand of the Father. St. Paul uses a Jewish concept to teach us. To sit "at the right hand" indicated authority from and special privileged access to God. With His return to the Father, Christ becomes our advocate who pleads our cause with the Father. During this time of fear and uncertainty that we find ourselves currently living in, now more than ever we need to plead our cause to Jesus! We find ourselves living in an "in-between" time just like the Apostles. The Ascension points us toward Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the Church. The Apostles stood between the departure of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit. They and we stand between the beginning of the Kingdom and its coming fullness. The Ascension should point us toward living not only in the spiritual "in-between time," but also how to live in the in-between moments of our lives.

During this challenging time we should ask ourselves the question, how do we live with disappointment, hardship, sickness, uncertainty? For most of us, there is fear and dread. For others, there is resignation to the worst case scenario. Where is the rejoicing? The Apostles were able to cope with the departure of the Lord. They rejoiced! Jesus had blessed them by giving them a way to make sense of their in-between time. He gave them a mission to witness to God's never ending love. As the gospel chosen for the feast this year states: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." Yes, we have been given our mission as followers of the Lord Jesus. Let us embrace it and let the Ascension show us our blessings.