

Sunday after Ascension

Morning Prayer A

First Lesson: Is 33:5-6, 17, 20-22

(same as that for Ascension Day EP)

Second Lesson: John 17

Homily

We are celebrating the Ascension of Our Lord.:
 Who was taken up into heaven,
 where he sits at the right hand of the Father,
 where he rules over the Church He established,
 and intercedes with the Father for us.
 We begin with the Prophet Isaiah,
 bidding us to look two ways at once:

*"... The LORD is exalted; for he dwelleth on high:
 he hath filled Zion
 with judgment and righteousness..."*

He dwells on high, but He is not removed from us.
 Zion, His Church, His people
 is filled with His presence.

*"... Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty:
 they shall behold the land that is very far off. ..."*

We look to the heavens to behold His glory,
 and we get some glimmer of the beauty that is there,
 but, we are called to

"... Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: ..."

Zion which stands for the Church of God,
 the place where we celebrate His majesty,
 in words and song, in bread and wine,
 in celebration of that one holy Sacrifice

*"... thine eyes shall see Jerusalem
 a quiet habitation,
 a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; ..."*

A city of earth, yet the city of God,
 where men strive and struggle and fail,
 but yet a city preserved by God for eternity.

*"... But there the glorious LORD will be unto us
 a place of broad rivers and streams; ..."*

For the Church is not a place,
 nor is Heaven a place,
 as we might understand place,
 but Our Lord is our resting place;

He is our home, both now in our earthly life, and forever and ever. Amen.

"... For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us."

In John 17 (the high priestly prayer), we receive a good foreshadowing of the Ministry of our Saviour at the Right Hand of the Father.

He prayed that night, the eve of his suffering and death, as He prays now in His glory, for the people He came to redeem.

"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us:

that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

Imagine, if you will, the power of the conversation that goes on within the undivided Trinity, a conversation that includes us, that expresses the Saviour's will for our lives.

Imagine, and then take a look at the reality around us. Do Christians manifest the unity of God? Or are we divided and constantly bickering? Do we show the power of love that was manifest in the washing of feet and on the Cross? Or do we prefer to show anger and to make ourselves look better than others?

Christ has ascended into heaven! May our hearts ascend to meet Him there.

Let us pray.

O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, the Prince of Peace; Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our

unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatsoever else may hinder us from godly union and concord: that as there is but one Body and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Sunday after Ascension

Morning Prayer B

First Lesson: Isaiah 4:2-6

Second Lesson: Hebrews 4:14-5:10

(same as that for Ascension Day EP)

Homily

Man's relationship to God has always been at the heart of what it is to be human, and that relationship has always been expressed in some form of sacrifice, in the offering of something tangible as an expression of worship.

The very discord between the first two sons, Cain and Abel, revolved around the quality of sacrifice, and Noah's first act upon landing after the Great Flood, is depicted as the offering of sacrifice. God, we are told, in the time of Moses, appointed a priesthood, specific men to offer specific sacrifices for the people.

We are assured by Christ Himself, and throughout the New Testament, that the Hebrew Scriptures are first and foremost,

a testimony and foreshadowing of the Saviour. "*...These are they which testify of me...*" He said. The sacrifices of the Old Testament, bloody, messy, and repulsive to our eyes as they may be, stand as a description of our redemption, of the victory over sin and death and the forces of evil, that was won on our behalf in the offering of the supreme Sacrifice on that holy Cross, an offering which was also bloody and messy and repulsive to our eyes, perhaps a fitting reminder to us that our sin is bloody and messy and repulsive in the eyes of God.

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession."

A Sacrifice requires someone to offer it. In Moses' time this was expressed as an appointed priesthood. Those priests, and only them, were appointed to represent the people and to bring their offerings before the face of God. In the fulfillment of all sacrifice,

the one true immortal Oblation of Calvary,
 there was a Priest,
 and He was also himself the Offering.
 On the night before His death,
 he, as high priest, said,
"This is my Body; this is my Blood,"
 declared it an offering for the sins of the world,
 and gave it to his disciples as a sacrificial meal.
 That night he labored in prayer,
 presenting that gift to the Father,
"Not my will, but thine, be done..."
 and gave Himself over to the authorities.

The next day the sacrifice was slain,
 the eternal worship was accepted,
 and on the third day He rose,
 and with Him we can rise.

We're observing the Ascension.
 Forty days after those events,
 Our Lord was taken up into heaven,
 where as eternal High Priest,
 He continually presents that one Sacrifice,
 once offered, in fulfillment of all promise,
 before the face of the Father.
 He is both eternal high priest
 and the sacrificial Lamb once offered,
 and stands as a pledge that no more need be done,

for the children of men
 to be children of the Living God.
 We are redeemed.
 The price is paid.
 We are called to the glories of heaven.

And, though we still struggle,
 though our sins are always with us,
 though we are forever tempted,
 and always falling into sin,
 our High Priest stands for us before God,
 and we can know that He is ...

*"not an high priest which cannot be touched
 with the feeling of our infirmities;
 but was in all points tempted like as we are,
 yet without sin. "*

He is Lord, awesome in His majesty,
 but He is our Brother in the flesh,
 He knows our weakness,

 and does not cease to love us,
 to intercede for us,
 and to call us.

Let us pray.

O Jesus, High Priest, Lamb of God, Saviour,
look down upon us in our struggles,
forgive us our many sins,
deliver us from the grip of our temptations,
and lift us up, at last,
to dwell with thee on high.

Amen.

Sunday after Ascension

Morning Prayer C

First Lesson: Isaiah 65:17-25

Second Lesson: Rev 21:1-14; 21-27

Homily

Today, the Sunday after Ascension, we stand figuratively with the Apostles on the Mount of Olives, looking upward in amazement.

We've watched our crucified and risen Lord as he was taken ever higher into the heavens, disappearing from our sight.

Here the Paschal candle has been snuffed, not as a sign that the Lord is absent, but that He has gone from our sight to take His place at the right hand of the Father, to intercede for us and to govern His Church, until His coming again.

We saw Him ascend, We heard our marching orders, to take this gospel into all the world, to teach, and to baptize.

But along with the orders there is a promise, a precious twofold promise:

that He will come again to judge both the living and the dead, and to call his own to His side; and that where he is, there shall we go.

Both lessons today reflect that promise. We hear twin visions by the Prophet Isaiah and the Beloved Apostle John.

Both of them were allowed to see, as well as any mortal man can see, the glories of a time and place that are quite unlike the time and place we know.

St. John speaks in strange symbols, a vain attempt to describe what cannot be described: He speaks of a city descending from heaven, a city prepared like a bride.

He described gates made of pearls, and streets paved with gold, but with gold as transparent as glass (whatever exactly that might mean), of jewels and walls and lights.

Elsewhere he writes of angels and saints, and strange beasts, all gathered around the throne. What does this all mean?

We really can neither know nor understand it now, nor could St. John,

but we can sense the intense beauty and the glory of it.

Both writers tell us of a new heaven and a new earth, and both of them make a great deal of what is NOT there.

Neither the weakness of an infant nor the feebleness of the old, nor the evils that beset this troubled world, for, as St John said,

"... there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."

The trials and sorrows that we know all too well will be forever gone:

"... I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;

and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

He has, as He said, gone to prepare a place for us, and while we wait for His appearing, He has provided a Church, the Word, the Sacraments, the knowledge of His grace, and the way to receive it.

He provides guides along the way, and His still, small voice is ever calling. *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you."*

He provides the waters of baptism, a new birth into his Church and His Kingdom.

To those who are baptized He provides Himself as spiritual food.

To the sinner He offers absolution.

To the pilgrim he opens the Way, and He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Come to Him,

Commit yourselves to Him.

And dwell with Him in glory everlasting.

Let us pray.

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings, with thy most gracious favour, and further us with thy continual help; that in all things, begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally, by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sunday after Ascension

Evening Prayer A

First Lesson: Wisdom 9

Second Lesson: Eph 1

Homily

The Sunday after Ascension comes in a short season of waiting. We just joined with the little band of disciples, as they stood with their Lord on the Mount of Olives, and watched as he was taken up into the sky, and in their wonderment they heard his command:

"... that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, said he, ye have heard of me. ... ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. ... ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me ..."

It was a time of waiting.

It was a time of wondering.

The infant not-quite-church had a mission,

but not a very clear idea of what the mission was, and certainly no idea whatever of how it would come to be done. It was a little band, very small, opposed by the Jewish authorities, opposed by the might of the Roman Empire, most of whom were simple folk, not very well educated, not wealthy, without powerful connections. They knew they were incapable of doing what they were commanded to do, but this one thing they could do -- they waited.

They gathered in an upper room, probably behind locked doors, certainly confused, probably fearful, but somehow full of hope, and they waited.

And what was it that they waited for?

They weren't really sure.

There was a promise from the Father, and somehow it involved the Holy Ghost, and somehow included power they did not have. And they waited.

The Book of Wisdom shows us a Solomon who came young to the throne, young and feeling very unqualified. He asked but one gift, the gift of wisdom, but not mere human wisdom -- something more, as he said:

"... wisdom was with thee: which knoweth thy works, and was present when thou madest the world, and knew what was acceptable in thy sight, and right in thy commandments."

"... what man is he that can know the counsel of God? or who can think what the will of the Lord is?"

Solomon knew his inability, The disciples knew their inability, and so do we. And so he prayed for divine wisdom, and the disciples prayed for the Holy Ghost,

and these are really one and the same, and by that Spirit of Wisdom and power, the will of God is made known, and the ability to do that will is given.

St. Paul gives a magnificent summary of God's will for His Church, and for each of us, beginning before the dawn of time:

"... he hath chosen us in him] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: "

and continuing to the very moment in which we now walk:

"... That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: "

Next week we celebrate Pentecost, Whitsunday, the day on which the Spirit of God, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, God Himself, was to fill the lives of those believers, after which nothing would ever be the same. On this rather strange in-between Sunday, we are reminded that we, too,

are weak and unqualified,
and yet have a mission that is too big for us.
We need that same Promise.
We need the fullness of the Holy Spirit,
and He has promised to grant it.
He fills His people, over and over again,
continually providing wisdom,
continually providing power,
continually guiding and using
those He has called ---- US.

Let us pray now,
in the words we heard read in the Second Lesson:

We come to thee, O God of our Lord Jesus Christ,
O Father of glory, asking that thou wouldest
give unto us the spirit of wisdom and revelation
in the knowledge of thee:
The eyes of our understanding being enlightened;
that we may know what is the hope in this calling,
and what the riches
of the glory of the inheritance in the saints,
And what is the exceeding greatness
of thy power to us-ward who believe,
according to the working of thy mighty power,
Which thou hast wrought in Christ,
when thou dist raise him from the dead,
and set him at thine own right hand

in the heavenly places,
Far above all principality, and power,
and might, and dominion,
and every name that is named, not only in this world,
but also in that which is to come:
And hast put all things under his feet,
and given him to be the head over all things
to the church,
Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all
in all.
Amen.

Sunday after Ascension

Evening Prayer B

First Lesson: Isa 32:1-4, 15-20

Second Lesson: John 3:16-21, 31-36

Homily

*"... a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind,
and a covert from the tempest;
as rivers of water in a dry place,
as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."*

Wonderful words from the Prophet Isaiah, just what this troubled world needs to hear, but just what this world is not willing to hear. There are wars everywhere, and always the treat of terrorism. There's a food shortage developing, There are famines, plagues, not only AIDS, but an increasing number of others. Climate change and other effects of pollution become increasingly worrisome. The news is full of all sorts of nastiness, all the time, and we, if we are honest with ourselves, find that we ourselves are a large part of many of these problems,

*"for all have sinned,
and come short of the glory of God."*

or, as Pogo of the cartoons said.

"We have met the enemy,
and he is us."

In the midst of such a troubling world, what we want is some kind of technique, a system by which we can solve the problems. We want something that we can do.

We want to stand up like rebellious teens, and to shout heavenward, "Father, I can do it myself!"

But we can't, and we really hate to admit it.

God hasn't provided us with something we can do, at least not something we can do ourselves, although there are ways we can cooperate with what He is doing,

but God has provided a solution, a complete and thorough solution, not a technique, but a man, the man Christ Jesus,

who, as reported by St. John, said:

*"... God so loved the world,
that he gave his only begotten Son,
that whosoever believeth in him should not perish,*

but have everlasting life."

a hiding place from the wind,
a shelter from the storm,
a fountain for the thirsty,
a shade from the searing rays of heat,
a Savior for the condemned sinner,
a Shepherd, Lord, and Friend.

*"For God sent not his Son into the world
to condemn the world;
but that the world through him might be saved.
He that believeth on him is not condemned:
but he that believeth not is condemned already,
because he hath not believed
in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
And this is the condemnation,
that light is come into the world,
and men loved darkness rather than light,
because their deeds were evil.
For every one that doeth evil hateth the light,
neither cometh to the light,
lest his deeds should be reproved."*

"A man shall be a shelter"

But he who refuses the shelter must face the storm,
and takes judgment upon himself.
If we refuse to admit that we have sinned,
if we refuse to recognize that we have a problem,

if we do not ask for forgiveness,
for shelter,
and for amendment of life,
we have no protection, no healing.

*"... But he that doeth truth cometh to the light,
that his deeds may be made manifest,
that they are wrought in God."*

That Man, the Son of God, our Saviour,
has ascended into heaven,
has promised the gift of His Holy Spirit,
has gathered us into a Holy Church,
where he feeds with Word and Sacraments.

He is our shelter and defense,
He is our strength and shield.

He intends that we be with Him where He is,
for ever and ever.

Let us pray.

O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment,
and light riseth up in darkness for the godly; grant
us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to
ask what thou wouldest have us to do, that the Spirit
of Wisdom may save us from all false choices, and
that in thy light we may see light, and in thy straight
path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Sunday after Ascension

Evening Prayer C

First Lesson: Dan 7:9-10, 13-14
(same as for Ascension Day, MP)

Second Lesson: Rev 22

Homily

We take a look this evening,
during this week of the Ascension,
as we stand, in our imagination,
looking skyward, into the clouds,
toward the last place where Jesus was seen,
as he ascended to take His place
at the Father's right hand --
we take a look, in tonight's readings
at the place where He dwells,
the place where He intercedes for us sinners,
the place to which He calls us,
the place from which He sent His Holy Spirit,
and from which He rules and governs His Church.
It is to this place,
to the throne room of Heaven,
that we ascend in thought, mind, and spirit,
every time we join in the Holy Eucharist,
in His own pleading of the Sacrifice of Calvary.

Scripture has many descriptions of heaven.
Much is said of that realm where God reigns
in all His glory,
of the blessedness where we shall reign with Him,
incomprehensible as that may sound.
The descriptions are mind-boggling,
impossible to get our thoughts around,
and sometimes they seem interminable,
so filled with exotic images
that we easily lose interest.
Who really cares about golden streets,
and gates made out of pearl,
and jewels everywhere you look?
But what if all that is a mere shadow
of the incomprehensible beauty that is there?

Maybe we're more interested in what is not there.
We're told there is no more pain or sorrow or dying.
We're told that all striving is over,
that there will be no lack of anything we need.

Above all, joy is found in who is there.
There are the righteous of every generation,
the saints who have served Him here,
our own loved ones, perhaps.
There are the thousands upon thousands of angels,
and, above all,
we shall be in the blessed Presence
of the Father Almighty,

of the Lamb slain
from the Foundation of the world,
Jesus, His only Son, our Saviour and Brother,
and the everlasting Holy Spirit.

We are incapable
of comprehending the wonders of Heaven,
but this is where He went, as He said,
to prepare a place for us,
for us -- though we do not deserve any of it;
for us -- though we have earned only condemnation,
for us who repent and believe and try to follow..

And there is something we must remember.
Everyone is invited.
everyone has the chance to accept this invitation,
but not everyone will.

As Jesus said:
*Blessed are they that do his commandments,
that they may have right to the tree of life,
and may enter in through the gates into the city.
For without are dogs, and sorcerers,
and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters,
and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.*

*He that is unjust, let him be unjust still:
and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still:
and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still:
and he that is holy, let him be holy still.*

*And, behold, I come quickly;
and my reward is with me,
to give every man according as his work shall be.*

God is merciful.

He does not desire that anyone be lost,
but He has given us free will.

We may accept His forgiveness and grace,
or we may choose to say, "NO."

We may repent, ask forgiveness,
and attempt to change our way of life,
or we may hold on to the things of our own will.
It really is up to us.

We are called.

The heavenly table is set,
A welcome awaits.
Will we accept it?

Let us pray.

Lead us, heavenly Father lead us,
O'er the world's tempestuous sea;
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
For we have no help but thee,
Yet possessing every blessing,
If our God our Father be.

Lead us, Father, Son, and Holy spirit
to the blest eternal destiny. Amen.