

SAINT JOSEPH CHURCH + YORKVILLE

May 12, 2024

Newsletter no. 217

During these days in the church year we are in an in-between time, with Ascension Thursday a few days in the past and Pentecost next Sunday. In the wake of the great feast of Easter, the Ascension might get relegated to a secondary position and might even be understood as something like an afterthought. But, even if it does not get the same attention as Easter, which is the most important day on the church calendar, it is certainly not an afterthought.

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, the Ascension is treated as a distinct event separate from the Resurrection. While it is true that Matthew doesn't mention the Ascension itself, his Gospel concludes with Jesus' final instructions to his disciples and his farewell to them, and Matthew seems to take for granted that his readers understand that Jesus' farewell is followed by his Ascension. Both Mark and Luke speak clearly of the Ascension at the end of their Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles, which was written by Luke, specifies that it occurred forty days after the Resurrection.

The Gospel of John, on the other hand, alludes to the Ascension in a mysterious manner, most notably in John 20:17, when immediately after his Resurrection Jesus tells Mary Magdalen, who had apparently attempted to embrace him, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father, but go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." And yet this same Gospel relates that, eight days after his Resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciple and thus had still not yet ascended to his Father. Many scripture scholars are of the opinion that John's Gospel combines the crucifixion, the Resurrection and the Ascension into a single concept, even though they are separate events. And so, when Jesus speaks of his being "lifted up"—as he does in John 3:14-15; 8:28; and 12:32—he is referring to his being lifted up on the cross, in his Resurrection, and in his Ascension. Likewise, when he speaks of his glorification—as he does at length in John 17:1-5—he is referring to these same three moments in his life, and how ironically does he do so as far as we are concerned, since we would hardly think of a crucifixion as a glorification! Jesus' Ascension, therefore, is his final "lifting up," the last act of his glorification, when he returns to his Father in heaven after having accomplished what his Father sent him to do.

Often the Ascension is coupled with the statement that, having ascended into heaven, Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Father. This we find in the earliest of the Gospels, in Mark 16:19: "The Lord Jesus... was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God." Numerous other passages in the New Testament refer to Jesus' session, as it is sometimes called, at God's right hand. In the Creed, too, it is linked with the Ascension: "He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father." What can this possibly mean? After all, God is spiritual and doesn't have a right hand, and much less does he have a need to sit down. Being seated at God's right hand, therefore, is obviously to be understood in a symbolic way.

Since ancient times the right hand has been a positive symbol, while the left hand has been a negative one. To be at the right hand of God himself, then, is not merely positive but means occupying the place of highest honor. (We may remember the parable in Matthew 25:31-46, in which the sheep are situated at Jesus' right hand and the goats at his left; the sheep are destined for heaven and the goats for hell.) Similarly, the very fact of being seated is symbolic of honor and authority; rulers and judges and teachers are seated, and Jesus is all of those things.

And so, the Ascension restores Jesus to his symbolic place at the Father's right hand, where with the Holy Spirit he and his Father share in the divine glory and power. There is a huge element of mystery in this, since Jesus, after all, ascended into heaven in a flesh-and-blood human body. But clearly Jesus' human body, after he rose from the dead, has properties that do not limit him in any way, as our bodies do, and so his body can occupy an entirely spiritual realm, as we hope that ours will do as well after our own bodily resurrection from the dead. Perhaps the most important teaching that Jesus' Ascension can offer us is that there is room for our flesh-and-blood bodies in heaven, just as, mysteriously, there is room for his.

Father Boniface

Mass intentions for the period from May 11th to May 19th

Saturday-Sunday, May 11th-12th (Mother's Day)

4:00 pm: Thomas Bernardi (D)
8:00 am: Angela Bartholomeusz (D)
10:00 am: Michèle Classe (L)
12:00 noon: Rose and Frank Christoforo (D)
2:00 pm (Hungarian): Fodor Margit (D)
6:00 pm: St. Joseph's Parishioners

Monday, May 13th

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: Deceased members of the Bazile, Lherisson, Haigl, Mews,
Thomas and Desmornes Families

Tuesday, May 14th

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: Nenita Gutierrez and Maria Gloria Porto (D)

Wednesday, May 15th

7:00 am: Pia Ong (D)
12:15 pm: Anne Classe (D)

Thursday, May 16th

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: Josephine Valle (D)

Friday, May 17th

7:00 am: In Thanksgiving to God and Jesus
12:15 pm: John (D) and Sarah (L) Keane

Saturday, May 18th

8:00 am: William P. Griffo (D)
12:15 pm: Wilfredo Rosario (D)
4:00 pm: Barbara Welch (D)

Sunday, May 19th (Pentecost)

8:00 am: Virginia Taylor (D)
10:00 am: Vincenzo Mangiafridda (D)
12:00 noon: Frank O'Callaghan (D)
2:00 pm (Hungarian): Csuma Juliana (D)
6:00 pm: St. Joseph's Parishioners