

Homily for The Ascension – Sunday, May 24, 2020.

Our Second Reading today is from the first part of The Letter to the Ephesians. But Paul is already deep in teaching – expressing, as one introduction to the letter put it, the cosmic significance of Christ.

I want to start with the last half of the reading. It mentions that Christ is seated, “far above every principality, authority, power, and dominion, and every name that is named...”

These are words that are familiar to us. In the Preface of the Eucharistic Prayers we sometime hear, “angels archangels, thrones and dominions, hosts and powers of heaven”

Just as on earth there are different names given to types of power and rulers, so also supernaturally. In Christian Theology, the words used of angels have been categorized into nine ranks. Going from lowest to highest they are: Angels; Archangels; Principalities or Rulers; Powers or Authorities; Virtues or Strongholds; Dominions or Lordships; Thrones; Cherubim; Seraphim.

And Jesus Christ, Our Lord, is above them; in His full Divinity; AND in His full Humanity.

Now let us go back to the First Part of our reading from Ephesians.

Our passage starts with a blessing, a prayer. Paul asks that the Ephesians be given “a Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation”, and that “the eyes of their hearts be enlightened.”

And he goes on in each case, to express the reason. It is so that they may have “knowledge.”

That knowledge is about Jesus. And he mentions that it is about their inheritance. For the purpose of speaking about the Ascension, this word “inheritance” is very important. Because the Knowledge the Holy Spirit imparts on us is not just book knowledge. It is knowledge that comes from a relationship. It is not knowing ABOUT Jesus, but KNOWING JESUS. When we know Him and are in Him, we are members of God’s family. And so we have an inheritance. And Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension gives us a glimpse of that inheritance.

To go through that step-by-step. The Incarnation is Jesus, who is God the Son, taking on our Humanity. He did not pretend to be human. He did not live “like” a human for a time. The Divine Nature is now wedded, married to a Human Nature – permanently. Jesus is Fully God – AND – fully human. He is one of us.

And now one of us has conquered sin and death. But there is still more.

At one point, Our Lord said {John 3:13}, “No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man.”

We cannot go to heaven on our own. We cannot, as the saying goes, “pick ourselves up by our own bootstraps.” But He can come down, and go back up – and make way for us.

He has returned to the Father. And now we know partially what it means that if we remain in Him, we will be with Him forever. Christ – fully Divine and fully Human – sits at the right hand of the Father.

God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord.

This is what we celebrate at The Ascension. In Baptism we die and rise with Him. If we remain in Him, we will be with Him. And at the Resurrection – we will be with Him in our totality – Soul and Body. This is our inheritance as brothers and sister of Christ, as sons and daughters of the Father.

At times of conflict or illness or fear or separation, we are not always sure we like having been made with bodies. But Christ did not avoid that part of our humanity. Christ came to us in our Humanity. Christ came not to eventually escape humanity. But He has redeemed humanity. We can live a life here on earth close to what Adam and Eve were meant to live. And we can experience a foretaste of the restoration of what they had before the Fall.

And we can invite everyone to the knowledge of Christ. We can invite everyone to Know Christ. We can invite everyone to become members of His body, His family. And as part of that family, the Ascension gives us assurance of a wonderful inheritance.