

"HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN AND IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER"

Jerry Johnson

"So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God." (Mark 16:19) With this statement from the Gospel of Mark, we understand that Christ's human presence on earth has come to an end and His glorified humanity is now at the Father's right hand in heaven. The Catechism tells us that upon His resurrection Christ's body was glorified, but that glorification remained veiled under the appearance of ordinary humanity until His ascension. Now His humanity has entered into divine glory in heaven. (CCC 659) What a sight that must have been to those who witnessed Christ's ascent and disappearance into the clouds! In a unique way, St. Paul would be the last to experience this presence as a "light from the sky" which "suddenly flashed around him" and drove him to the ground. (Acts 9:3-4) What can we come to understand about this presence and Christ's role now at the "Father's right hand"?

First of all, Christ's ascent into heaven gives us proof of another realm beyond our earthly existence and it gives us the hope of our own entry into this supernatural realm. After all, Jesus told his disciples that He would be "going to prepare a place" for them and that He would "take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be". (John 14:2-3) Jesus has gone to prepare a place for each one of us. As the only one who "descended from heaven", (John 3:13) He was the only one who could then ascend into heaven to

give all of humanity access to the "Father's house" (John 14:2).

As the letter to the Hebrews tells us, Jesus has also entered heaven "now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf". (Heb 9:24) He now lives to "make intercession" for us who "draw near to God through Him". (Heb 7:25) How does this intercession take place? The Book of Revelation tells us that Christ's presence before the Father is as "a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain". (Rev 5:6) It describes the twenty-four elders proclaiming in song "...for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." (Rev 5:9) Christ's intercession for us takes the form of a sacrifice, the same sacrificial presence which is presented on the altar at every Mass. The very real and substantial presence of Christ in the Eucharist. He is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) God, the Son, once again condescends to be wholly present to us in the Holy Eucharist. If we receive Him worthily in this wonderful Sacrament, we come into a Holy Communion with Christ that raises us up and changes us!

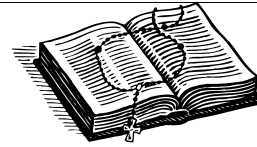
The Catechism goes on to tell us that being seated at the Father's right hand indicates the glory and honor of Christ's divinity and "signifies the inauguration of the Messiah's kingdom..." (CCC 663,664) Once again, this is also expressed in the Book of Revelation as John heard "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, 'To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!'..."

and the elders fell down and worshipped." (Rev 5:13-14) Jesus, as the Lamb, is worshipped alongside His Father. No one but God is to be worshipped, so in this we see the unity and divinity of the Father and the Son. In chapter 17 verse 14 of Revelation the Lamb is also described as the "Lord of lords and King of kings" and in chapter 19 Jesus appears as a man seated upon a white horse and clad in a robe that bears the same inscription; "King of kings and Lord of lords". The King has ushered in His kingdom and those first apostles who bore witness to His Ascension went on to bear witness to His Kingdom, His Church, in which we now dwell. Does this all sound very "out of this world"? It is, but then it isn't. That is the mystery. This supernatural Kingdom is also manifested right in front of our eyes. But do we have "eyes and not see and ears and not hear"? (Mark 8:18) Do we "Seek first the Kingdom of God..."? (Matt 6:33)

Lord, help us to seek, to see, and to hear! It is only by your grace that the eyes of our hearts are opened. Grant us that grace today and each day of our lives! May we be witnesses to your Ascension in our lives and on our altar and may your presence drive us to our knees as it did St. Paul! Amen.

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SACRED SCRIPTURE



"Then he led them (out) as far as Bethany, raised his hands, and blessed them. As he blessed them he parted from them and was taken up to heaven. They did him homage and then returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple praising God." (Luke 24:50-53)

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight."
(Acts 1:8-9)

"In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be." (John 14:2-3)

"But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not

the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption."

(Heb 9:11-12)

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." (Col 3:1-3)

SACRED TRADITION

"Christ's ascension marks the definitive entrance of Jesus' humanity into God's heavenly domain, whence he will come again..." (CCC665)

"'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.' (John 12:32) The lifting up of Jesus on the cross signifies and announces his lifting up by his Ascension into heaven, and indeed begins it. Jesus Christ, the one priest of the new and eternal Covenant, 'entered, not into a sanctuary made by human hands . but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.' (Heb 9:24) ..." (CCC 662)

"Being seated at the Father's right hand signifies the inauguration of the Messiah's kingdom, the fulfillment of the prophet Daniel's vision concerning the Son of man: 'To him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.' (Dan 7:14)..." (CCC 664)

THOUGHTFUL QUESTIONS

Do we recognize the sacrifice of Christ on the altar at each Mass as the same sacrifice that is perpetually presented to the Father in heaven on our behalf?

Do we see Jesus as both sacrificial Lamb and King as He sits at the right hand of the Father?