

The Ascension of Christ

Matthew 28:16-20

We celebrate the Ascension of Christ.

We find the actual account of the Ascension in

- the Acts of the Apostles
- the gospels of Luke and Mark

Here in Matthew, we simply have the Eleven going to the mountain (understood: from which Jesus ascended) and receiving final encouraging “instructions”.

The Ascension is a sort of culmination, a culmination, however, that does not as this passage suggests, preclude doubt.

The Eleven *saw* and doubted.

It is not surprising that we, who do *not* see, at times doubt...

(note: the Eleven needed faith to know that Jesus was God.)

What is the reality of the Ascension?

What is the Ascension all about?

Is it Jesus rising into the sky like a hot-air balloon?

Is it a huge vacuum from above pulling Jesus upwards?

Is it something like ET going home?

I think that *envisioning* it will not get us too far in terms of *understanding* it.

Let us begin by stating that it *made sense*, that it was *fitting* that Jesus ascend.

Why?

Because Jesus rose from the dead with a *glorified* body

(completely transformed by divine love),

i.e., a body in conformity/harmony with the reality of heaven.

The heavenly place is one of incorruption.

The earthly place, earth, is one of corruption, i.e., change and decomposition.

It was not fitting that Christ, with his perfect, incorruptible body, remain on earth after the Resurrection.

For a time, Christ remained on earth, *out of mercy*,

- to confirm the truth of His Resurrection
- to encourage His disciples who struggled to believe

Now, let us continue by stating that, in addition to being fitting for Christ,
the Ascension is a good thing *for us*.

We must not resign ourselves, thinking,

“Well, He just had to ascend. He couldn’t stay here forever.”

Firstly, as St. Leo (+461) says,

“By ascending He did not abandon His friends.” Indeed, although His bodily presence is withdrawn, still, as God, He is ever-present:

“I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

Secondly, as St. Thomas Aquinas (+1274) says,

“Christ’s ascension into heaven, whereby He withdrew His bodily presence from us, was *more profitable* than His bodily presence would have been.”

The Ascension is a good thing for our faith, hope, and love – *and that is a good thing!*
(faith, hope, and love bind us to God)

Saint Thomas Aquinas’ insights help us to see that the Ascension:

1. **increases our faith**, which is of things *unseen*.
And “blessed are they that see not, yet believe.”
2. **uplifts our hope**, for “by entirely placing in heaven the humanity which he assumed, Christ gives us the hope of going there”.
3. **directs our love to heaven**, where the fullness of all goodness lies.
That is why St. Paul says, “Seek the things that are above,
where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.”

The disciples were overwhelmed.

- Jesus appears after rising.
- Jesus invests them with the power to communicate grace, i.e. to baptize.
- Jesus, all the while speaking of leaving, promises to stay.

Jesus’ promise is fulfilled in the sending of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps Jesus’ promises to us are all fulfilled in the sending of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the one who makes it all happen in us.

He is the Advocate and the Consoler, who guides us to the heart of God

– which is what Jesus wants us to have.

Indeed, He wants our joy to be complete.