



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Ascension of the Lord

The Cause of our Gladness

Readings: Acts 1:1-11, Ps 46, Ephesians 1:17-23, Luke 24:46-53

Today we celebrate the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven.

(Thirty five years ago, on my first trip to Walsingham, I found myself in the Anglican Shrine in a dark dusty chapel under the Orthodox Chapel. Carved in the ceiling was a puff of cloud and, in the middle of it, a pair of feet disappearing through the ceiling. It was the Chapel of the Ascension. Standing next to me was a large American man who looked at me and looked at the ceiling and said simply, 'We have lift off'.

That, I think, for many is as far as it gets with this mystery.

So I want to try a simple exercise.

I'd like the younger people, those under thirty five to look at the older people here. Go on take a good hard look.

OK so that's your future. I can see you're excited by it.

I'm afraid we're all a bit shabbier than we were.

For example when Fr. Keith and I first met thirty years ago we were debonair handsome young men. These days we have to rely a little more on our inner beauty.

The fact is that the prospect for mortal man is not good. In human terms we are looking at decline, debility and death. This flesh and blood is destined for dust as we are reminded on Ash Wednesday.

The Gospel tells us that while that may be part of our future that is far from the end of the story.

In a few moments our first communion children will be given a Cross, the sign of our Faith. It is on the Cross that Jesus Christ took on and defeated the power of Death so that His disciples, you and me, while we may not look forward to the process of dying any more than He did, we need never fear death itself.

In the Forty days between Resurrection and Ascension, or in the English church's curious calendar 44 days, Christ appeared to His disciples in His Risen Body. God in Man had taken man through death into a new dimension of life.

Now it is, with that witness complete and its reality so firmly established in the hearts and minds of the disciples, that they will give their lives in the four corners of the world to proclaim that extraordinary hope.

Now the final act brings us to the Bethany Road and to the Ascension.

It is the final act of the Easter season and the final act of the saving work of Christ. It is the day when the visible Presence of the Redeemer passed over

into the sacraments and our future is assured. God in Christ has taken man into eternity in Himself.

Pope St. Leo the Great, in our office readings this week, describes it thus, 'The Lord's Resurrection on Easter Day filled us with joy; so too His Ascension into Heaven is the cause of our gladness as we celebrate the day on which our lowly nature was raised up in Christ above all the Hosts of Heaven, above all the ranks of Angels, beyond the height of the heavenly powers to the throne of God the Father.'

Christ ascends, body and soul, humanity and divinity to the eternal presence of the Father. That is why, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can receive His Body and Blood, His divine life, at every altar of Christendom. Man is not returning to Eden but rather, for those in Christ, man is absolved and purified and swept up into the Godhead Himself for all eternity. That is why the Catholic Church stands, often alone but with absolute conviction, for the dignity of Man and the Sanctity of Human Life.

The Ascension of Christ completes the work of the Salvation of Man.

Born of dust. We will be raised in glory.

Created in time. We are made for forever.

That is the future of those in Christ.

Not so shabby after all.

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