



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Ascension of the Lord - Year B

I am with you always until the end of time

Readings: Acts 1:1-11, Ps 46, Ephesians 4:1-13, Mark 16:15-2

The restoration of the Feast to its proper day (Thursday), forty days after the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead does a number of things – apart from assuring our Anglican friends that we are not quite so careless of Holy Scripture as they sometimes assume us to be. The well-intentioned experiment of moving it to the nearest Sunday to emphasise its importance and assure greater attendance merely served to obscure its significance and interrupt the symbolic significance and essential rhythm of the Church's liturgical year.

The forty days is far from insignificant because the number forty echoes like a drumbeat through the history of salvation. The number '40' occurs in Scripture over 140 times. Forty days in the wilderness. Forty days on Sinai. Forty years in the wilderness. Forty days of rain. Forty days preaching in Nineveh etc etc. You can look up the other 140 yourselves. The number is an epoch and a decisive event with eternal consequences. It completes a task of both judgement and salvation. So it is utterly appropriate and, perhaps even, predictable that the post-Resurrection appearances of Our Lord, His instructions and teaching, to those who were about to become the Universal Church, should be contained in this

sacred period of time. We live in the midst of and by the grace of these divine mysteries and it is important to honour them in our solemn celebrations.

What is concluding (and beginning) for Man on this extraordinary day is really beyond human language. Whatever we make of the brief account of events on the Bethany road, the meaning is clear. The Risen Lord has ascended into Heaven. That is the simplest and clearest conclusion. But it is more than that. For Christ does not shuck the mortal coil of His existence and slip effortlessly and essentially back into spirit and non-corporeal divinity. In His Risen and transformed humanity, the sinless tabernacle in which He has defeated death, He lifts the destiny of Man back into the eternal Presence of God. It is, literally, the Apotheosis of Man. That is to say not merely the common understanding of the word, apotheosis, i.e. the highest point of humanity but the literal meaning of the Greek word itself- the making of god, the divinisation of Man.

The first significance of this solemn feast is therefore the assurance of our future in Christ.

The second is also of huge import for what we do every time we gather at the altar of the sacrifice. Christ's translation into Heaven on this festival day transfers His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity from the restrictions of both time and geography and restores both natures to the eternal which gives access to all time and unfettered ubiquity. He, the eternal One, is present throughout all time and He is able to be everywhere. It is for both these reasons and because of them that we can celebrate the Mass and be confident of the Real Presence of Christ.

In the Ascension Jesus has both guaranteed our Heavenly destiny and His Presence in our food for the journey on the pilgrim way.

As St. Matthews Gospel concludes with these words of Jesus:-

'I will be with you all the days until the end of the age.'

I am with you always until the end of time.

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