

WORD FROM THE PASTOR

THE ASCENSION AND THE PROMISES OF CHRIST



Today we celebrate the Mystery of the Ascension. The Evangelist Luke himself does not describe this Mystery with the exact same details.. In the First Reading, he presents to us disciples who surely struck with astonishment at the event remained with their eyes fixed upon Heaven. Yet in the Gospel, the very same Luke while recounting the event places the emphasis this time on the joy overflowing from the disciples' hearts as the Master ascends to Heaven. What are we to make of this? Does Luke contradict himself? Certainly not. Words are always limited when one attempts to speak of a person and even more so when attempting to speak of the God-Man. Luke's concern highlights two attitudes that characterize the disciples in the face of this mystery: astonishment and

joy.

Indeed, how could one not be filled with astonishment when granted the privilege of witnessing such an extraordinary event? **Furthermore, how could one not be overwhelmed by divine joy when, at the very moment Christ ascends to Heaven, three promises are made to the disciples and, by extension, to all of humanity? These are the promise of the sending of the Spirit, the promise of Christ's return, and the promise of humanity's own ascension into the divine sanctuary.** How could one fail to rejoice in the face of these three promises, which, taken together, stand as a truth unprecedented in the history of religions?

The promise of the sending of the Spirit marks a new stage in the unfolding history of God's relationship with humanity. It is precisely by virtue of this event that man is given the title of "witness." **A witness not merely because he is called to be a bearer of hope, but also because sustained by that very hope he becomes "another Christ."** **The second promise concerns the return of Christ: "Jesus, who was taken up from among you, will return in the same way that you saw him go into heaven."** This promise, announced by the "men in white garments," reveals to us a fundamental truth of our faith: Christ's ascension is not an evaporation. Christ will return. His departure already sounds like the announcement of his return. The promise of the Spirit is thus situated within the framework of the continuity of Christ's work of love.

The second promise contains within itself the third promise: that of the elevation of humanity into the divine sanctuary. The conclusion is inescapable: by reconciling heaven and earth, it is humanity that is gloriously ushered into divine love. The promise God makes to us at this level is, therefore, good news. **The unity of these three promises of the Ascension lies in the very fact that, with God, a promise possesses not only an eschatological dimension (pertaining to the end times) but is also realized in the "today" of our world.** To live on earth as in heaven is, therefore, to realize that the promise of the sending of the Spirit is already being fulfilled in our lives; it is to realize that the promise of Christ's return is already being fulfilled in interpersonal encounters, in the sacraments, and the forgiveness we extend to one another.

To live on earth as in heaven is, ultimately, to realize that our glorification in God has already begun. That is why I would like to conclude by reminding us of this exhortation from the Epistle to the Hebrews: **“Let us, therefore, draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that Faith provides our hearts cleansed of whatever defiles our conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is Faithful.”**

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