

The Ascension of Our Lord, A✠D 2009

Mark 16:14-20 Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.]

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 God has a body. Not God the Father nor God the Holy Spirit. But God the Son, the eternal second Person of the one Triune God, He has a body. This is no mysterious, spiritual body, but a real one, as real as yours and more. It's the kind of body that grew nine months in the womb of His mother and was born wrinkled and red. It's the kind of body that cried when hungry and burped on the Blessed Virgin's shoulder when full. It's the kind of body that bled drops of bright red blood onto the razor-sharp flint knife when it was circumcised. It's the kind of body that thirty-three years later poured pints of bright red blood when slashed with the razor-sharps bits of bone in the soldier's whip and when pierced with the dull steel nails that held him to the cross. It's the kind of body that convulsed and gave a loud cry when it died. It's the kind of body that was reverently buried in a fresh-hewn tomb.

2 God has a body. He honored humanity by taking human flesh. Because His humanity was corrupted neither by original sin nor by committed sin, He was perfectly human, more human than everyone else born with Adam's stain. The Divine Word of God, the Eternal Son of God, is your Brother. He has honored your body by having His own sinless body. He has elevated humanity by descending to us. And now He has elevated human nature by ascending into heaven. God and Man together, Jesus Christ was conceived, was born, suffered, was crucified, dies, was buried, descended, rose, ascended, sits, and will come. A human body—

glorified and exalted by its union with the Divine Nature, but a human body nevertheless—sits at the right hand of God the Father.

3 God has honored your body with His sinless life, with His innocent suffering and death, and with His glorious resurrection and ascension. Do you do the same? Or do you instead despise your body? God has created your body just as certainly as He created the bodies of your first parents Adam and Eve. God has honored your body by christening it in Holy Baptism to belong to Him. He has made your body—yes, your human, fleshly, blood-and-bone body—to be a temple for the Holy Spirit. And how do you respond? Do you join the popular culture in denigrating the body, seeing this body as something temporal, to be cast aside at death finally to set your spirit free? Your body is a good creation and gift from God, designed for eternity, destined to be raised at the Day of the Lord's return. Do you look with loathing at a person hooked up to life-support machines and call him a "shell" of a person? He is no shell anymore than you are. Do you see your body as a mere collection of parts to be harvested or donated? Do you look in the mirror and see an ugly body rather than the beautiful one God has given? Do you abuse your body with drugs, cigarettes, alcohol, or laziness?

4 Is your abuse of your body the kind St. Paul warned against when he exhorted the Corinthian Christians to "flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:18-20). Do you see your body as an instrument to pleasure yourself, rather than one to bring pleasure to your husband or wife? Do you see your body as merchandise which you may barter in order to win a boy's affection? Do you see the bodies of others as instruments for your own pleasure apart from the Creator's good plan for marriage?

5 There is no shortage of ways to abuse the gift of your body. And yet God has made you and all creatures and has given you your body and soul, eyes, ears, and all your members, your

reason and all your senses, and still takes care of them. Jesus honored His body in order to honor yours. He took human flesh to redeem humanity from sin. His body was abused in the place of yours. His body suffered so yours might not suffer eternally. He bore the curse of the cross, the penalty for sinfulness, so your body might be free from sin's taint.

6 Having died the death sinners deserve, the Sinless Son of God rose from the grave. And He didn't rise with just His spirit, but He rose body and soul together. His resurrected body is a real body, the kind that ate fish for breakfast with His disciples. And He ascended into heaven, not with a spirit, but with His real, flesh-and-blood body. His resurrection is proof of your resurrection, proof that if He who takes away the sins of the world rose from the dead, so will those whose sins are taken away by Him. And His ascension is proof of your ascension, not of your going up into heaven but of the renewed heavens and earth coming to you. He ascended in order to return, to bring you to be with Him.

7 Nothing, no sin, no denigration of the body, no abuse of God's gift of your body, is worse than the abuse of the body of God upon the cross. Having paid for your sin, He delights to honor your body—body and soul together—with His gift of forgiveness. And He has. All these sins He bore on His own body on the cross. Now to you your Lord has delivered His gifts of faith and the forgiveness of sins not in some other-worldly, spiritual way. No, He took water, combined with His word, and applied it to your body. He hasn't left confidence for your salvation in something ethereal or imperceptible. He created your body with its senses, so it only makes sense for Him to honor your body by delivering faith and forgiveness through those senses. He has delivered faith through the hearing of His word. He has delivered forgiveness through the touch of a minister's hand and the hearing of his voice.

8 As proof of your Lord's concern for your body, He feeds you not with mere bread and wine but with His real body and His real blood. These, He promises, are for the forgiveness of your sins. Your body is a good gift from God, so He bids you not merely feel forgiven, but to taste and touch His forgiveness. Whoever eats His flesh and drinks His blood, with faith in Him

to forgive sins, will live forever. That's not some spiritual living forever where your body is cold and hard six feet under but a real living forever, where your body is raised incorruptible and glorified, free from sickness, suffering, or death, to live forever with your Creator.

9 How can you be sure? Because He who lived, died, and rose for you—Jesus Christ—ascended for you. There, He reigns from the right hand of God the Father. He who sits at God's right hand has a human body. The King of Heaven is your kinsman, your Brother. He ascended for you and will return for you.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
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