

The Ascension of Our Lord, A✠D 2008

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 *Sursum corda!* Hearts up! Lift up your hearts! This line from the Preface is one of the oldest parts of the liturgy. Hearts up! You prayed in the collect for this very thing: hearts up. "As our Lord Jesus Christ ascended into the heavens, so may we also ascend in heart and mind and continually dwell there with Him." Hearts up. We lift them up unto the Lord. Or at least you'd like to lift them up. But it's easy to let your heart get weighed down. There are bills to pay and errands to run. There are mouths to feed and noses to wipe. There are lawns to mow and problems to fix. Hearts up? Hardly.

2 Minds up! St. Paul directs you, in the portion from his letter to the church in Colossae on which is based this collect, "set your minds on things above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." (Col 3:3-4) Lift your minds, place them not on the sins that so easily entice but on the things that are above, the *sursum* things. Repent of allowing your minds to dwell on the lower things, the things of the old flesh. "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth." (Col 3:5-8). Minds up!

3 The Ascension of the Lord is nothing spiritual. It's a physical thing. The Second Person of the Trinity took physical flesh, was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary. His was real flesh, just like yours, sliced with a flint knife at eight days of age. Real flesh, the kind that shredded under the lash of Roman whips, thirty-nine lashes, to be exact. Physical flesh, the kind that was held to the rough-hewn wooden cross with real steel nails. His flesh was the perfect union of the divine with the human. But until His resurrection, he set aside some powers of His divinity. Then, having died to defeat death, He rose. He didn't rise in His spirit and leave His body behind. No, he rose body and soul together. And having risen, Jesus no longer set aside the powers and privileges of His divinity. He walked and talked and ate fish for breakfast; He was still fully human, to be sure. But he also walked through locked doors and vanished from the sight of the disciples walking to Emmaus; now the fullness of His divinity is displayed, as well.

4 Then He ascended. He was born with your flesh. Lived and died with flesh just like yours. But He was more human than you because He was sinless. And, having died and risen from the dead, He ascended. His ascension means the elevation of your flesh, too. You ascend in heart and mind. And His ascension gives hope for your ascension, for your eternal union with God in body and soul. As you'll pray momentarily in the Proper Preface, Christ's ascension makes you a partaker of His divine life. The union of God and man is yours, too. His ascension means the ascension, the elevation, of your flesh, too.

5 Hearts up! Minds up! Bodies up! The taking on of human flesh by Jesus at His incarnation is a blessing to human flesh. His life elevates your life; His work as a carpenter elevates your work. His days, His everyday living, cause your days to ascend above the everyday. The suffering of Jesus on the cross is your relief from suffering. His victory over death is your victory. And His ascension is your ascension, too. Your hearts, minds, and bodies are lifted above the mundane into the heavenly. Suddenly, everyday tasks like loving your wife, fixing meals for your children, working in your neighbor's garden, sweating in an

assembly line, or teaching history to children are no longer earthly work. They are heavenly work. Because Christ ascended with human flesh, your human flesh ascends, too.

6 But don't get any hyper-pious notions about Christ's ascension. Yes, He ascended into the heavens and the clouds received Him from sight. But just because you cannot see him doesn't mean He is no longer present. Sure, like God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, God the Son is everywhere, all-present. But He is not everywhere for you, for your benefit. You won't find Jesus on the golf course, at the mall, or on a fishing trip. Seek Him only where He has promised to be for your salvation.

7 Where is that? Where His body and blood are, of course. He who ascended gives you His very body and blood—crucified, risen, and ascended for you—to you to eat and to drink for your salvation. At this altar, though He is still veiled behind the clouds of bread and wine, such that your eyes cannot behold Him, Jesus is truly present, physically present for you. Hearts up! We lift them up unto the Lord.

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

Soli Deo Gloria
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