

28/05/2020

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily for the Great Vespers of the Ascension



May 27, 2020

Church of our Savior

Rye, New York

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We have come this evening to the Church of our Savior in Rye, New York, a parish dedicated to the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we have come to celebrate the miracle of His Person – perfect God and perfect Man.

The Ascension marks the return of the Lord from the great pendulum swing into our history that commences with the Incarnation. Using the very body of the Virgin Mary like Jacob's ladder, the Lord descended into her womb at the moment of

conception.[*] Using His Cross like a ladder, He descended by death into the depths of Hadēs to raise the dead. Rising on His authority as Son of Man and Son of God, He overcame sin and death to grant unto us eternal life. And today, in fulfillment of His promise to Nathanael when He first called him, the skies opened wide and the Lord Himself became the ladder upon which “the angels of God ascend and descend....”[†]



Thus, the Lord completed the arc of His Divine Οἰκονομία, His Divine Plan of Salvation on our behalf. On the night in which He gave Himself for the life of the world, the Lord Jesus said:

“It is to your good that I leave. I am telling you the truth. If I do not go, the Comforter will not come to you. But if I cross over, I will send the Comforter to you.”[‡]

His Ascension is no desertion of His flock. By no means! Rather, it is the way that He is present to His Flock no matter how far and wide it may extend, even to the uttermost parts of the earth.[§] And in ten days, on the Holy Pentecost, we will behold this miracle of His omnipresence!

Furthermore, by His Ascension, the Lord has, as Saint Paul says, “seated us in heavenly places,”[**] such that through and in His human nature, every human being is potentially already in the Heavenly Realm. This is confirmed in the Epistle

to the Hebrews which says:

“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are reflections of the true reality; but into Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”[††]

He presents His Divine Humanity – which he shares with us through the Παναγία, to the Heavenly Father. And like on the Feast of the Presentation every February 2nd, when the ancient Symeon embraced Christ in his arms Forty Days after His Holy Nativity; now, Forty Days after His re-birth by the Resurrection, the Son of God is received in the embrace of the Ancient of Days, His Heavenly Father, in the Celestial Palace of the Kingdom of God.

And we are already there with Him! His Humanity is our humanity. This is the promise, “the trustworthy word,” given to every human being:

“For if we have died with Him, we shall also live with Him;

if we have suffered with Him, we shall reign with Him....”[‡‡]

And what is this suffering that defines our inheritance of glory? It is nothing less than our capacity to sacrifice our own egos, our own wills, our own self-centeredness for the sake of love. In this, our love of our neighbor is the measure of our love of God. For as the Apostle of Love says:

“For if you do not love your brother or sister whom you do see, how can you love God Whom you have not seen?”[§§]

My beloved Christians, this Feast of the Holy Ascension is a promise for all of us, for every human being. It is our promise of eternal life in the Kingdom of God, which begins right here on this earth, as we pray in the Lord’s prayer, “on earth as it is in Heaven.”

If we can live in the warmth of love, in the glow of the Resurrection, then we will know the truth and the reality of our faith. And we will know that our future is in Heaven, with God, Who is glorified in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

[*] Cf. Genesis 28:12.

[†] John 1:51.

[‡] John 16:7.

[§] Cf. Acts 1:8.

[**] Ephesians 2:6.

[††] Hebrews 9:24.

[‡‡] II Timothy 2:11,12a.

[§§] I John 4:20.

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