

Are you saved?

A common question we have all heard

And one that is often directed against Catholics

How do we take this question when we hear it?

I think mostly we think: saved from hell, right?

But today's feast offers another viewpoint

What are we saved for?

And when we realize that

It opens a brand new outlook

Rather than running from something

We run to someone

You are saved for heaven

You are saved for eternity

You are saved for God

We begin our readings this week by going back

Ever since Easter, we have been reading from the Acts of the Apostles

Today, we go to the beginning of this book

A continuation of the Gospel of Luke

The Book of Acts speak of the mystery of God's presence in our lives

It is a mystery of how Christ reigns in the world

While sitting at the right hand of the Father

How he is building his kingdom through his disciples

Beginning with the Apostles

And continuing today

When Christ Ascends into heaven, he goes away

And at the same time, he remains

When he walked with his disciples

He told them of the one who would come

He tells them to wait for him before they begin their mission

They don't grasp what their mission is

Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?

They are speaking of the kingdom of David

But Christ's kingdom is not an ethnic kingdom

His kingdom is not confined to a national border

His kingdom will extend to the ends of the earth

When he tells them this

While they are looking on

He is engulfed in a cloud

Taken from their sight

Suddenly two men are with them

Men of Galilee

Why are you standing here looking at the sky?

This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven

Will return the same way

The cloud calls to mind the transfiguration

The glory of God

It also calls to mind the Old Testament

When the cloud fills the Holy of Hollies

And the cloud that led the Israelite nation for forty ears

And brought them into the Promised Land

His departure is not a journey to the stars

It is not a cosmic journey

It is a journey to another dimension of being

An entry into the mystery of God

Into a communion of power and life with God

This is how he can be gone from us

And yet remain with us at the same time

His promise to send the Holy Spirit is renewed in every generation

In our letter to the Ephesians

St Paul tries to explain this mystery

He teaches The Ascension is more than a line in our creed

It has implications for our lives on earth

Jesus is seated on his throne

And ruling through his church, which is his body

The hope that belongs to God's call

The riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones

And the surpassing greatness of his power

These belong to us

His body, the Church, because of the Ascension

The Apostles were the first to experience this

He gives them their mission

He gives us our mission

Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature

To preach baptism and salvation

Quite a mission to an unkempt bunch like the apostles

They were not educated in the worldly sense

Laborers, fishermen, a tax collector and a political zealot

They were not worldly travelers

And yet they were chosen for this mission

As we are chosen for our mission

To take our place in the mission of the Church

The Ascension brings an end to this phase of Jesus' life on earth

But it opens up the way for the next phase of his life on earth

The disciples had been his companions

**They would now be his co-workers
He would reign through them
Through us down to our own day
The disciples had walked with Christ
They had witnessed his passion and death
Then he was raised
He walked with them
He ate with them
They probably thought this was the way it was going to be
And now he goes away
But it is not like we might think
We tend to think there is a spiritual realm and a physical realm
A two tiered understanding
Separate one from the other
This is our rational thought process
How things are depicted in art
But the Biblical view is one of connection
They are interwoven with each other
The visible and the invisible
All a part of God's creation
Jesus isn't off on some different planet**

Winding a clock to keep things going here

He remains in a relationship with the Father

And with us on earth

He sends his spirit to guide us

To bring heaven to earth

And earth to heaven

This is central to the Ascension

The Ascension teaches that we are not saved from hell

We are saved to be with God in heaven

To be with Christ in this life

We see the suffering and death of Christ led him back to the Father

We can unite our suffering with his

And be led to the Father

We see through the Ascension our real destiny

It is the destiny of humanity

We are not made for worldly domination

We have what St Thomas called 'partia'

We have a homeland

And nothing on earth, or even everything on earth, can take its place

Our home is in heaven

And the Ascension teaches Jesus' presence will not be through seeing

But in believing

His presence will fill the earth through the sacraments

Through the Mass

In this way he is in all places simultaneously

He is here in this church

If we go on vacation

He is there in the nearest Catholic Church

Even if we turn our backs, He is there

Waiting with open arms for our return

The Ascension isn't the end of Jesus' story

Next week we will hear of another event

We will hear the story of Pentecost

But for today we recall a new dimension in our relationship with Jesus

Knowing that the Son became man

So we might become sons and daughters in him

We see that we are saved for God

To be with him for all eternity

Not running from something

But running to someone

This is how the Ascension becomes more than a history lesson

It becomes a destination