

The Ascension of Our Lord
St. Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:1-11

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

As you were to pore over the Scriptures, you would find periods of time where God is simply silent. There was no thunder from heaven, no smoke, no fire, no trembling mountains—only silence. Not much is said of God's activity in the time between Noah and Abraham. The Old Testament closes and there was 400 years of silence before John the Baptist, to which even the Apocrypha attests. (cf. 1 Maccabees 9:27) Even in the New Testament, there's hardly a word from God, even as He walks on earth in the flesh, between the time of Jesus' Annunciation to His birth, between His birth and baptism, and a little between His resurrection and ascension. Of course, we presume to know that God was active in all of those times, but we read and hear little to nothing of them.

We now live in a time referred to as The Saeculum, a Latin word meaning "age" or "period of time." It is used to refer to a period of time since an event occurred and the death of the last person to witness the event. This Saeculum that we live in is marked by the period of time in which no one living as seen Jesus in the flesh. By the standards set forth so far in this sermon, The Saeculum is another period of silence from God—there is no thunder from heaven, smoke, fire, or trembling mountains, at least, none of which we can attribute to the direct activity of God to mark His presence. The Canon of Scripture is closed, as there is no further revelation from God. Jesus has come, died on the cross, rose from the grave, and is now ascended to the right hand of majesty.

Now, there is silence...only silence.

But, we are not alone. Wherever two or three are gathered in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, there Jesus is among them. Jesus promise before ascending was to be with His people always, to the end of the age—the end of The Saeculum, you could say. Therefore, Jesus is here, right now, in the flesh, though you cannot now see Him with your eyes or with any other sense perceive Him. When you do see Him again, that will be the end of this age, this Saeculum.

At that time, Jesus will return just as those witnesses saw Him ascend. Then, the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised, and this corruption will put on incorruption, this mortal will put on immortality, and the saying will be brought to pass, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:51-55) On that great and dreadful day, Jesus Christ the Lord will return and all the dead will rise from the graves, the righteous—all believers in Christ—to everlasting life (cf. Small Catechism, Creed, Article III), and the unrighteous to everlasting punishment, the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (cf. Matthew 25:41, 46)

But, why the perceived silence? Why the ascension of our Lord?

Dear hearers, it does you well to ponder these questions and recall the answers that you have been taught about the Ascension of Our Lord. Jesus Christ our Lord, in His flesh, is ascended to the right hand of the majesty of God in order from eternity to direct all things for the good of those who have faith in Him. Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man, is in eternity as your Prophet, Priest, and King.

- As Prophet, Jesus sends men to preach the Gospel of redemption. Through these men, your God is active and speaking, bringing to light your sin by way of the Law of God and proclaiming to you the truth that your sins are covered by the blood of God, who died on the cross at Calvary. (cf. Ephesians 4:10-12)
- As Priest, Jesus pleads on your behalf before the Father. Flesh like yours intercedes on your behalf—He is your advocate—in the Divine Council that is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. (cf. Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1)
- As King, Jesus governs and protects His Church as Her Head, even ruling the world in the interest of His Bride, the Church. So, as King of kings and Ruler of the universe, Jesus sends

good and adversity in order that you would be cared for in this life and learn to trust in Him for the life to come. (cf. Job 2:10; Matthew 22:44)

Furthermore, Jesus Christ, the enfleshed God, is in eternity preparing a place for you, that where He is, you to shall be. (cf. John 14:1-3) In the meantime, as was mentioned, He uses means to prepare you for that day when He returns—your pastors and teachers, the Word, and the Sacraments.

Dear hearers, it also does you well to ponder more regarding Christ's ascension.

First, Jesus ascended to fulfill prophecy. As we recited this evening in the Introit, the Psalmist prophesied, "God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet." (Psalm 47:5 KJV) St. Paul quotes from Psalm 68 as speaking of Jesus' ascension: "You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, Even from the rebellious, That the LORD God might dwell there." (Psalm 68:18) Jesus also predicted His ascension before Nicodemus and His disciples, having said, "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven." (John 3:13)

Second, Jesus ascended to demonstrate where He was going. The ascension was an event in the life of Jesus that was actually witness as it happened, unlike the resurrection. The Resurrection was attested to by those who saw Jesus crucified and three days later and after, interacted with Jesus, holes in hands and feet and side as He was; but no one saw Jesus rise from His burial cloths and walk from His grave (at least, none who recorded it for us). His ascension, however, was seen and recorded for us, and by it He tells us that He has ascended above all things—that He has gone "up" to be with the Father to reign over all things, as the realm and abode of God is described for us in terms that we can understand as being above us. That's where Jesus was going, so He showed, to reign with the Father and prepare a place there to which to bring you.

Third, as St. Paul describes for us, Jesus is "the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things." (Ephesians 4:10) What does this mean? Well, I can put it simply this way: Jesus ascended in order to help us in believing. Think about this with minds made holy by the blood of the Lamb. There would be more stumbling blocks to your faith had Jesus not ascended, for you would be able to see Him where He is had He not. Therefore, our Lord ascended in order for you to better come to terms with the faith that you confess.

For, by that faith you confess that your Lord, Jesus Christ, is omnipresent in human flesh like yours. Now, you know that in your flesh, you can be in only one place at a time. In your flesh, you occupy only one place. Jesus, however, in His flesh, occupies all places at all times. He is, at this moment, in this corner of the room as He is also in the opposite corner, even as He fills all things. Furthermore, as two or more are now gathered here in His name, He is most certainly here to give you all good things in preparation for your life to come, but He is also in another place where two or more are gathered in His name also receiving His gifts. He is here for you and He is there for them, and all at the same time.

At the same time, it strains your feeble minds to comprehend Jesus fleshy omnipresence, yet by faith we confess it as the Scriptures teach, even as we attempt to grasp it by the logic that we cannot see our ascended Lord who ascended to fill all things.

Furthermore, as we confess a real and living presence of the body and blood of Jesus in the Sacrament of the Altar, it is easier to come to terms with that since we cannot see Him with our own eyes. Ponder this for a moment, had Jesus not ascended, but remained in one place visibly, then would it not be more difficult to confess that in, with, and under the bread of Holy Communion, you are given to eat of the body of Christ, if you could see that body, and see it not being consumed? Or the blood of Christ in, with, and under the wine and see that Jesus is not bleeding and growing pale as you take of the cup?

In other words, if Jesus is in one place, how can He be in any other place, or in all places at once? Well, of course, He is God, and that answer would be enough. But, that we may more easily take Him at His Word, He ascended far above all the heavens in order that He might fill all things.

You could also picture the masses flocking to see and touch Jesus if He were still among us. Christians would be making pilgrimages as the heretic Mohammedans do to their Mecca. Then the Scriptures would be false and God a liar, as they and He proclaim that we do not walk by sight, but by faith. (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:7) A faith based on sight is no faith at all, which would discount all the promises that God made for your forgiveness, life, and salvation. To seek such a faith, therefore, is to doubt God and sin against Him.

So, while Christendom confesses an omnipresent God, even in the flesh of the Son, there are those who have trouble with this as they understand Jesus' ascension to the right hand of the majesty of God to be an ascension to a particular location. These Sacramentarian fanatics, as our Formula of Concord describes them, confess that since Jesus is there, at the right of the throne, then He cannot be in the bread and wine. Of course, to deny the real presence on such grounds would be to deny the omnipresence of the Son of God, even in His flesh.

It should go without saying, then, that if Jesus is present, bodily and bloodily, in the Sacrament of the Altar for you, then He is likewise present in His Word for you. Again, because we cannot see Him as He was once seen, it is easier to take Him at His Word to be present in His means of grace, including His Word proclaimed, so that when the called minister of His Word declares that you are forgiven, then you are forgiven indeed, as Jesus promised that resurrection night in the locked room. (cf. John 20:23)

Fourth, Jesus ascended in order to send the Holy Spirit. As we heard two and a half weeks ago, the Holy Spirit works through the Word and in the Church to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. It is good, Jesus says, that He went away, or else the Helper would not be sent. But Jesus did go, and the Helper is sent, and He is come to convict you of sin—to show you your sinfulness and just how despicable and deplorable you are according to the Law of God—and He is come to convict you of righteousness—to declare to you the forgiveness won for you on the cross, where Jesus has overcome your deplorable-ness and despicable-ness and given to you in Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, and Holy Communion for the sake of Jesus Christ—and to convict you of judgment—that the ruler of this world, the devil, is judged and condemned, meaning that there is therefore now no condemnation for you who are in Christ. (cf. Romans 8:1)

Finally, by the help of God the Holy Ghost, your minds are fixed on the ascended Jesus, anticipating and praying for His return. "Come quickly, Lord Jesus." In the meantime, the Helper brings you to Jesus' word of promise, which you heard earlier from the angels speaking to the witnesses of the ascension: "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

Your minds are fixed by God the Holy Ghost on the ascended Jesus, who was crucified for you and is risen from the dead, because He is here, as He promised, present in His flesh and blood in His means, for your keeping in the faith, for your forgiveness, life, and salvation. Here, though you do not see Him, He gives Himself to you, even as He had given Himself over to death for you, and so you are strengthened, redeemed, saved, forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.