

The Ascension of the Lord
May 29, 2022
Year of Saint Joseph

“In Christ ascended into heaven, the human being has entered into intimacy with God in a new and unheard-of way; we henceforth find room in God forever.” (Excerpt From, Holy Days, Pope Benedict XVI)

In preparing for this celebration of our Lord’s Ascension, I read a homily from Rev. Ronald Knox. A brief introduction of who Rev. Ronald Knox is must first be offered. Ronald Knox (1888-1957) was the son of the Anglican bishop of Manchester, England. He was a distinguished scholar from Oxford who converted to Catholicism at the age of twenty-nine. He would study and become a priest, authoring numerous homilies, catechetical lessons, and books concerning spirituality. The purpose for my introducing Rev. Knox concerns the thoughts and comments he offered concerning the Ascension of Jesus. Allow me to offer you this homily, I pray, doing justice to the memory of such an eloquent preacher.

For many here today, we have seen much in the history of the world. The events you have lived through, the experiences you have had; I marvel at and consider myself blessed to have known these events through your stories. I confess, listening to many of you, I find my own experiences rather small. This being said, the advances in science and technology have left man feeling puny in his universe. For the medieval person, the Ascension seemed so very intimate. The world they knew was not so large; maybe only to the water’s edge. At night as they looked up, the moon and stars seemed closer. The dome of the sky was always within the scope of their vision. In art, paintings of the Ascension showed Jesus just above the cloud as the Apostles and disciples looked on. Mysteries abound intriguing the mind and children heard fascinating tales conveying lessons learned from the adventures of others.

I realize some will think this description too fanciful. They could easily point to the difficulty with man’s life during this time. Disease, hunger, war, and a host of other infirmities plagued the medieval person. They will conclude with a statement such as: “Thank God for our advancements in science, medicine, and technology which have made our lives so much easier.” Yes, I admit this is true, but with these advances came a sense of loss in mystery. We now know the expanse of our universe is many millions of light years. Some now scoff when reading the story of the Ascension of Jesus tongue-and-cheek asking if He is still ascending. And ascending to where? A Heaven located beyond our

universe; to sit at the right hand of a spiritual being residing upon a mythical throne. For all of the progress we have made, we have, unintentionally, robbed ourselves of both the mystery and the intimacy of God.

I realize, as do you, that the writers of the Gospels and the New Testament Letters were not as scientifically advanced as we presently are. Yet, the truths they intended to convey in their writings are still true and actively affecting our lives to this day. The inspired author of The Letter to the Hebrews wrote these words referring to the Ascension of Jesus: *“Having therefore a great high priest that hath passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God: let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest, who cannot have compassion on our infirmities: but one tempted in all things like as we are, without sin.”* (Hebrews 4:14-15). This is the truth that the author wanted all Christians of every age to know — the veil has been eternally torn in two.

My dear family, to understand the importance of this reference we must travel back in time to the Temple of Jerusalem. The Holy of Holies, the most sacred and mysterious place in the Temple which housed the abiding presence of God, was curtained off. Only once a year was the curtain drawn to one side. It was on the Day of Atonement. On that day, the high priest would set into that sacred abode and sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed victim (lamb) to atone for the sins of the nation. This same curtain was torn in two, top to bottom, when our Jesus died upon His Cross. The Ascension is when He now enters into the true Holy of Holies to offer for all time the Precious Blood of the Perfect Sacrifice. Jesus, our High Priest and our Divine Victim, offers His Blood for our sins. With the veil now removed, we too may enter where He our Head has preceded us. We too may now enter into the Eternal Presence of God offering the Body and Blood of His Son mingled with our own personal sacrifices for our sins and the sins of the world (past, present, and future). We may never be able to bridge the gap separating the “new men of science” who still scoff at our beliefs, chuckling as they ask if Jesus is still ascending. Yet, we know most assuredly, that our Lord is present with His Father and present with us both in our tabernacles and in our hearts. May our lives reflect this belief.