



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 17 April 2013

[Multimedia]

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning!

In the Creed we say that Jesus “ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father”. Jesus’ earthly life culminated with the Ascension, when he passed from this world to the Father and was raised to sit on his right. What does this event mean? How does it affect our life? What does contemplating Jesus seated at the right hand of the Father mean? Let us permit the Evangelist Luke to guide us in this.

Let us start from the moment when Jesus decided to make his last pilgrimage to Jerusalem. St Luke notes: “When the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Lk 9:51). While he was “going up” to the Holy City, where his own “exodus” from this life was to occur, Jesus already saw the destination, heaven, but he knew well that the way which would lead him to the glory of the Father passed through the Cross, through obedience to the divine design of love for mankind. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that: “The lifting up of Jesus on the cross signifies and announces his lifting up by his Ascension into heaven” (n. 662).

We too should be clear in our Christian life that entering the glory of God demands daily fidelity to his will, even when it demands sacrifice and sometimes requires us to change our plans. The Ascension of Jesus actually happened on the Mount of Olives, close to the place where he had

withdrawn to pray before the Passion in order to remain in deep union with the Father: once again we see that prayer gives us the grace to be faithful to God's plan.

At the end of his Gospel, St Luke gives a very concise account of the event of the Ascension. Jesus led his disciples "out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God" (Lk 24:50-53). This is what St Luke says.

I would like to note two elements in the account. First of all, during the Ascension Jesus made the priestly gesture of blessing, and the disciples certainly expressed their faith with prostration, they knelt with bowed heads, this is a first important point: Jesus is the one eternal High Priest who with his Passion passed through death and the tomb and ascended into heaven. He is with God the Father where he intercedes for ever in our favour (cf. Heb 9:24). As St John says in his First Letter, he is our Advocate: How beautiful it is to hear this! When someone is summoned by the judge or is involved in legal proceedings, the first thing he does is to seek a lawyer to defend him. We have One who always defends us, who defends us from the snares of devil, who defends us from ourselves and from our sins!

Dear brothers and sisters, we have this Advocate; let us not be afraid to turn to him to ask forgiveness, to ask for a blessing, to ask for mercy! He always pardons us, he is our Advocate: he always defends us! Don't forget this! The Ascension of Jesus into heaven acquaints us with this deeply consoling reality on our journey : in Christ, true God and true man, our humanity was taken to God. Christ opened the path to us. He is like a roped guide climbing a mountain who, on reaching the summit, pulls us up to him and leads us to God. If we entrust our life to him, if we let ourselves be guided by him, we are certain to be in safe hands, in the hands of our Saviour, of our Advocate.

A second element: St Luke says that having seen Jesus ascending into heaven, the Apostles returned to Jerusalem "with great joy". This seems to us a little odd. When we are separated from our relatives, from our friends, because of a definitive departure and, especially, death, there is usually a natural sadness in us since we will no longer see their face, no longer hear their voice, or enjoy their love, their presence. The Evangelist instead emphasizes the profound joy of the Apostles.

But how could this be? Precisely because, with the gaze of faith they understand that although he has been removed from their sight, Jesus stays with them for ever, he does not abandon them and in the glory of the Father supports them, guides them and intercedes for them.

St Luke too recounts the event of the Ascension — at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles — to emphasize that this event is like the link of the chain that connects Jesus' earthly life to the life

of the Church. Here St Luke also speaks of the cloud that hid Jesus from the sight of the disciples, who stood gazing at him ascending to God (cf. Acts 1:9-10). Then two men in white robes appeared and asked them not to stand there looking up to heaven but to nourish their lives and their witness with the certainty that Jesus will come again in the same way in which they saw him ascending into heaven (cf. Acts 1:10-11). This is the invitation to base our contemplation on Christ's lordship, to find in him the strength to spread the Gospel and to witness to it in everyday life: contemplation and action, *ora et labora*, as St Benedict taught, are both necessary in our life as Christians.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Ascension does not point to Jesus' absence, but tells us that he is alive in our midst in a new way. He is no longer in a specific place in the world as he was before the Ascension. He is now in the lordship of God, present in every space and time, close to each one of us. In our life we are never alone: we have this Advocate who awaits us, who defends us. We are never alone: the Crucified and Risen Lord guides us. We have with us a multitude of brothers and sisters who, in silence and concealment, in their family life and at work, in their problems and hardships, in their joys and hopes, live faith daily and together with us bring the world the lordship of God's love, in the Risen Jesus Christ, ascended into Heaven, our own Advocate who pleads for us. Many thanks.

Greetings:

I offer a cordial welcome to the members of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, and I assure them of my prayers for their episcopal ministry. I also greet the priests of the Institute for Continuing Theological Education at the Pontifical North American College. Upon all the English-speaking visitors present at today's Audience, including those from England, Denmark, Sweden, Australia, India, Singapore, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Canada and the United States, I invoke the joy and peace of the Risen Lord.

I hope that this Easter time will be a profound invitation to everyone to renew their life, putting it at the service of the Gospel.

Lastly I greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. May the Risen Lord fill with his love the heart of each one of you, dear *young people*, of you students, today so numerous, so that you may be ready to follow him with enthusiasm. One cannot understand a young person without enthusiasm! Follow the Lord with enthusiasm, let him guide you. May he sustain you, dear *sick people*, so that you may accept the burden of suffering serenely; and may he guide you, dear *newlyweds*, so that your family will grow in holiness, after the model of the Holy Family.

I learned with sorrow of the violent earthquake that hit the peoples of Iran and Pakistan, sowing death, suffering and destruction. I raise a prayer to God for the victims and for all those who are suffering, and I want to express my closeness to the Iranian and Pakistani peoples. Thank you.