

## Feast of the Ascension – 21 May 2009 - Vespers

{The following sermon was prepared under the supervision of Pastor Wiley and approved by him for reading at the Ascension Vespers by Deacon Jon Holst.}

*In the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Today we, the Church, have the privilege of celebrating together, as the Bride of Christ, the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. Forty days ago, we began the Easter season with the annual celebration of our Lord's resurrection. So, just as Christ ascended into heaven forty days after His glorious resurrection, we as the Bride of Christ celebrate and commemorate His ascension forty days after Easter. In the narrow view of our sin-corrupt nature, we tend to adopt a "Church on Sunday" mentality. This being the case, the Ascension has not gotten a lot of attention, owing to the fact that it always falls on a Thursday. Thanks be to God, though, that we are able to come together, united as the body of Christ, to focus on this holy event, to consider what it means when we confess that Jesus "ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty," and to receive the great blessings of forgiveness, life and salvation that God would work in us through His holy Word.

First off, the Ascension is most definitely not a going away party for Jesus. Our same sin-corrupt nature that pulls us away from receiving God's gifts other than on Sundays also tends to want to see the Ascension as Christ our Lord as completing His thirty-three years of hard labor on earth and then going to the right hand of the Father to take a much deserved rest until He has to return again at the Last Day. But to understand the Ascension rightly, we must ask the question: Just where is the right hand of the Father? We know, of course, from Scripture and

from a thorough catechesis therein, that God is everywhere. That being the case, the right hand of the Father must, likewise, be everywhere. St. Paul, writing by inspiration to the Church at Ephesus, sums up Jesus' presence thus: "[Jesus] ascended far above the all the heavens that He might fill all things." All things. Everywhere. Therefore, Christ's Ascension does not articulate to us His absence, but rather His presence: a presence that is for the Church and in the Church.

Now here's the next point. Jesus did not ascend only according to His divine nature. At the Incarnation, at the infleshment, the divine and the human were united in our Lord Jesus Christ. "The Word became flesh," forever uniting humanity and divinity in the person of Jesus Christ. So, when Christ ascends "to fill all things," He does so according to His two natures: both His divine **and** His human. This being the case, when St. Paul writes that Jesus fills all things, we must remember that Jesus fills all things not just spiritually, but bodily as well: for this (and pardon the theological term) this hypostatic — or personal — union of divine and human in Jesus Christ, cannot be divided. And this great miracle is seen by us most clearly in Holy Communion where under the veil of bread and wine, we receive the very Body and Blood of Christ: the hypostatic—personal—union of divine and human, of spirit and flesh, being given to us for the forgiveness of sins.

Now back to the fact that our sin-corrupt nature tells us that Sunday is "the **only**? Church day." This is exactly what the devil would have you believe. Satan, that old serpent, that liar of liars, encourages this line of thinking because he knows, better than we do apparently, that it is in the Word and Sacraments that we receive our ascended Lord. Yes, Christ ascended so that He may fill all things, but it is in His Word and in His Sacraments that He promises to be there for us. We know this, we've been taught this: some of us all of our lives. But the fact remains that our sin-corrupt flesh denies it and Satan takes advantage of that to drive a

wedge between us and the forgiveness of sins that Christ offers in his Word and Sacraments. satan doesn't want us to confess our sins. he doesn't want us to hear the Word of God from Scripture and as proclaimed by Christ's called Servants from the pulpit. he doesn't want us to receive the hypostatic union of divine and human, of spirit and flesh, being given to us for the forgiveness of sins. he doesn't want us to "pray for the whole Church of God and for all people" in private, family and corporate prayer during the week.

So, let us repent of the inroads satan has made on our sin-corrupt nature and rejoice in and embrace the reality of the Ascension—as we celebrate it this Thursday evening. That just as a watery cloud received Jesus, Jesus is there for us in the waters of Baptism to cleanse us and make us children of God. That just as the two white-robed witnesses spoke the Word of God to the disciples, Jesus speaks the life-giving Gospel of forgiveness to us now through His called Servants. And, that just as Jesus, according to His two natures, Ascended to the right hand of God to fill all things, so too does the hypostatic union of Christ's divinity and His very flesh and blood fill the Sacrament of the Altar which He feeds us with for forgiveness, life and salvation. And, being thus united to Christ, we too, share in His Ascension and are raised up from the depths of sin and death into God's glorious kingdom as St. Paul says in Ephesians:

“God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

*In the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*