

Pope Shenouda III series

6

***MEDITATIONS
ON
THE FEAST OF THE
ASCENSION***

***BY HIS HOLINESS AMBA SHENOUDA III,
POPE AND PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA
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ALL THE PREDICATION OF SAINT MARK***

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His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

Pope and Patriarch of the See of Alexandria and of all the

Predication of the Evangelist St. Mark

The Cover of the book.

***In the Name of
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
the One God,
Amen***

In this pamphlet, you read about:

- ***The manner of The Ascension***
- ***The glorious body – is not against the terrestrial gravitation.***
- ***A proof of His Divinity.***
- ***The meaning of the sitting at the right of the Father.***
- ***He was not separated from The Church during His Ascension.***
- ***A weaning operation for the Apostles***
- ***His Ascension is a pledge for our ascension***
- ***Meditations on the Ascension***
- ***The spiritual life is an ascension***
- ***The wisdom of the ten days***

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FOREWORD

I have the pleasure to present to you this booklet about the glorious Feast of The Ascension, in which I shall converse with you about:

- **The Ascension of The Lord Jesus-Christ was with the body.**
- **It was an Ascension with a glorious body. It was not against the terrestrial gravitation.**
- **What is the meaning of His Ascension on the clouds? What is His relation to the clouds?**
- **The Ascension is a proof of His Divinity, and is the end of “making Himself of no reputation”.**
- **What is the meaning of His sitting at the right of the Father?**
- **In His Ascension, The Lord Christ was not separated from His Church.**
- **His Ascension was an operation of weaning for**

His Apostles.

- **His Ascension is the pledge of our ascension to Him.**
- **Some meditations on the Ascension. Lessons from the glory of The Ascension.**
- **All the spiritual life is an ascension.**
- **The wisdom of the ten days between The Ascension and The Pentecost.**

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The Church celebrates The Feast of The Ascension, on Thursday on the fortieth day after The Resurrection of The Lord, and we would like to meditate together on the spiritual meanings that are included in that Feast, so that we can celebrate it with a deep comprehension of the inspirations which are embodied in the Feast.....

The Christ spent forty day with His Apostles after the Resurrection, and on the fortieth day he bade them farewell, and promised them that they
“shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon” them.
(Acts 1:8).....

“Now when He had spoken these things, while they

watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up,

” – two angels stood by them and said to them: “why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1: 9-11)

What is then our meditation in this Ascension?

* * *

The Feast of The Ascension is a feast of The Lord. The miracle of The Ascension is special to the Lord Christ alone. It has never happened to any human being, but it was exclusively for The Lord: like His virginal birth. It was like His Resurrection by the power of His Divinity and His coming out of the closed tomb, and like The Transfiguration on the mount Tabor. Such also was His Ascension to heaven and His sitting at the right of The Father.

He ascended by Himself, and not like the prophet Elias who was taken by a chariot of fire and ascended into it. (2 Kings 2: 10-11)

And not like Enoch who *“was not, for God took him. (Genesis 5:24)*

As for The Lord Christ, He ascended by His power, without any external power.

* * *

In the same manner as He arose by His own power alone, without anybody arising Him, so also He ascended by His power.

The power of the Ascension was in Him, just as the power of The Resurrection was in Him. His glory appeared in both.

HOW WAS THE ASCENSION

It was an Ascension with the body, with the human nature:

because the Divine Nature neither ascends nor descends. He fills all. He is present in Heaven and on earth, and in what is between both of them. How then would He ascend to Heaven while He is in Heaven?! And how would He leave the Earth to go to Heaven, while He remains on earth during His Ascension?! Consequently we must say that The Lord ascended with the body (that was united to the Divine Nature). That is what we say to Him during the prayer of the Holy Gregorian Mass: “at the moment of Your bodily Ascension into Heaven”.

* * *

The Ascension of The Lord was in the clouds:

“while they watched, he was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.” (Acts 1:9)

He ascended in glory on a cloud, such as also He will come in His second coming, on the clouds in glory. He said thus to the chief priests during his trial before the Crucifixion, *“hereafter: you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Matt. 26:64)*

This expression adds that the sitting at the right hand of the Father, was one of the glories of the Ascension.

In the Holy Bible, the clouds represents the glory and the coming of the Lord. In the story of the blessing of the seventy elders as assistants to the prophet Moses, the Lord says about Moses: *“the Lord came down in a cloud and spoke with him....”* And when the tabernacle was finally erected and arranged, the divine Intuition said: *“Then the cloud covered the*

tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.” (Exodus 40: 34-35)

In the New Testament, before the miracle of The Transfiguration:

“And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ”This is My beloved Son, Hear Him!” (Mark 9:7), (Luke 9:35)

CHRIST DID NOT PART FROM US IN HIS ASCENSION

The Lord Christ was with the Apostles in the flesh....then He Ascended from them, but He did not part from them.

The Ascension of Christ to heaven, was not a separation from His Church on earth.

**It was not a separation from the Church; it was not relinquishing or forsaking the Church, because He said:
“ I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:20)
And He said also:**

“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” (Matt. 18:20)

**Consequently He is with us in the Church, and in every spiritual meeting. He is with us in the Holy Eucharist in every mass. He is [Immanuel, which is translated “God with us”.
(Matt. 1:23)]**

**The Apocalypse gives us a moving picture of The Lord Christ walking in the midst of the seven churches, holding in His right hand seven stars that are the pastors of the churches.
(Apoc. 2:1)**

He also abides in us, and we in Him (John 17), and He

also dwells in our hearts through faith (*Ephesus 3:17*).

It is just simply that He is with us in an invisible manner.

For we have become in the New Testament in a state of spiritual maturity, in which we live by the word of The Lord:

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:29)

We believe in the existence of God with us, without seeing Him, and we believe in the existence of The Holy Spirit in us, without seeing Him. It is sufficient for us to see His work, and to touch His Hand in our life.....

* * *

Christ is with The Church on a level which is higher than the level of the senses, and higher than the level of visible things.....we do not see Him in the body but we believe that He is with us through faith, and

“faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1)

In the Ascension of Christ, He disappeared from the sight of the Apostles.....but He did not disappear from their souls. That was an evanescence, but not a departure....It was an operation of weaning for the senses, so that the soul might be nourished through faith, and not remain under the power of the senses.

Before the maturity of the Apostles, He had permitted them to see and touch, and live depending on the bodily sensesbut after their maturity, and after the coming of The Spirit upon them, they will have then to see through faith.

It is as if He says: “ You are no more in need to see me in the body....you are now in the stage of maturity, and you see me through the spirit. And effectively, in that maturity the Apostles did not feel at all that Christ had parted from them. Let then this thought be in our hearts.

WEANING

The Ascension of the Lord to heaven was an operation of weaning for the Apostles:

During the time of their discipleship to Him when He was in the midst of them through the body, they were used to depend upon Him in everything without doing anything themselves. It was He who performed the miracles, and He who replied to those who opposed Him, while the Apostles stood as spectators; Their discipleship was merely following Him and learning from Him. They contemplated and learned.....

But then after the Ascension, it was time for them to be weaned, and to assume all the spiritual responsibilities themselves: to make disciples of all the nations, to teach to them to observe all things that the Lord had commanded them (Matt. 28), to reply to those who oppose them, and to suffer pain in the work of preaching.

The weaning of the Apostles by Christ, did not at all mean that He relinquished them, but rather it meant the proclamation of their development and maturity, and their assuming responsibility.

Christ had spent forty days with His Apostles, talking to them about the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.....but He did not prolong the forty days....these were enough. Afterwards He Ascended and left them to minister. That was no surprise. But they had ten more days ahead in which to make themselves ready and to wait for the coming down of The Holy Spirit upon them.

With the forty days, the stage of preparation for the ministry ended, and the stage of faith through the senses ended.

Be mobilized then. Let every one say: “O Lord, I feel that you are with me, and I feel that Your word is in my mouth. I shall minister but not with my human nature, but

with Your Spirit, You will give me what words to speak. Then I would make miracles, but with Your power Yourself.

The Lord was like an eagle teaching the little ones how to fly.

When they grow up or when they become mature, he carries them upon his wings, then drop them in the air and flies up away from them, so that they move their wings and learn how to fly. In all this, he does not forsake them, but rather he watches them and comes to protect them if they encounter any danger.

Or like a father teaching his son how to swim. He carries him on his hands, then leaves him inside the water after having taught him how to swim, in order that he would swim alone and experience the water. Nevertheless he does not forsake him, but stays near with him, and assists him whenever he is in need.

In a similar manner, The Lord trained His Apostles during three years or more, and sent them also for a practical training (Matt. 10). Then when the training stage was finished, He ascended from them so that they would act by themselves and complete their mission, while He would be with them always, even to the end of the age.

The Ascension was the proclamation of the end of the training stage and of the beginning of the ministry.

Therefore He said to them before His Ascension:
“you shall receive power when the Holy Sprit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to me” (Acts 1:8).

And He said:

“Go into all the world and preach he gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:1)

And He said also:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”

(Matt. 28: 19-20).

THE ASCENSION AND GRAVITATION

Some would ask: “Did The Lord trample down the law of terrestrial gravitation?”

To answer this question, we mention two important points:

- 1. God had established the natural laws in order to submit nature to them, and not to submit Himself to them! Was there then a miracle? Here I answer:**
- 2. It was a miracle for us to see The Lord Christ ascending with His body upwards to heaven. But effectively that was something natural for the glorious body with which The Lord is risen.**

Therefore the miracle of the Ascension was not in the victory over the terrestrial laws of gravitation, rather it was in the spiritual celestial body, that could ascend upwards. It was then a sublimation of nature, and not a contradiction to it. It was a kind of transfiguration of the nature of the body.....

If it was a natural body that ascended up to heaven, we would have said that this was against laws of terrestrial gravitation. But when a spiritual celestial body ascends to heaven, that is a matter which is in accordance with the exaltation of the new nature which the body takes in the resurrection, and then becomes a spiritual body, for “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 15:50)

* * *

Verily, the miracle is the body of the Resurrection or the body of the Ascension.

Christ has ascended into heaven with a glorious body, going steadily upwards, not at all submitting to the laws of terrestrial gravitation.

It is a body that has not the material weight which draws downwards, but has rather another glorious nature who can ascend.

Verily, the Lord Christ is risen with a glorious body, that could go out of the tomb while it was closed, and could enter the upper room to the Apostles, while the doors were locked. (John 20: 19-26), but the Apostles were not certain about the glory of His body, because they “supposed they had seen a spirit”, and then because they handled Him, and because He condescended “and ate in their presence.” (Luke 24: 37-43)

But they entered to the depth of the faith in that glorious body during the Ascension, that attracted their sights upwards, so that the two angels said to them:

“why do you stand gazing up into heaven? (Acts 1 :11)

*** * ***

The miracle of the Ascension is the transformation of the material body into a spiritual body, a heavenly body, a glorious body, that can go upwards. That same thing will also happen to us in the Resurrection, when “we shall be glorified with Him”, we shall be “raised in incorruption”, we shall be “raised in power”, in glory.

(1Cor. 15: 52-53)

“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” (1 Thess. 4:17)

The Apostle announces us that the Lord “will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Philippians 3:21)

meaning that we shall be raised with a glorious body.

He explains this matter in detail in the chapter of the Resurrection (1 Cor. 15), how our mortal body will “put on immortality”, and the “corruptible must put on incorruption”. We shall take off the animal body of dust, in order to put on a spiritual luminous heavenly body. (1 Cor. 15: 41-50)

* * *

Therefore the Ascension of the Lord is the pledge of our ascension.

In the same manner as the Resurrection was the pledge or our resurrection, since He is

“the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20), and

“as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Cor. 15: 22),

so also in the Ascension, we hear Him say:

“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”

(John 12: 32)

on the clouds, and in heaven, and with a glorious body, and we shall be always with the Lord, in the heavenly Jerusalem the dwelling of God with men” (Revelation 21: 2-3) on a level that is higher than matter and higher than the senses, in the likeness of the body of His glory, among the myriads of His saints, when we shall also be glorified with Him (Rom. 8:17), when we shall be raised in glory (1 Cor. 15:43) and consequently we shall ascend to Him in glory...

We have received in the image of the Ascension, the pledge of the glorious body that is lifted up to heaven.

That still remains our hope, in that He will deliver us from matter and its outcome, and that our body will not be a material body forever, but that we shall put on the spiritual, by the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23). But what is the way

that leads to the glory which our bodies will obtain?

The way that leads to the glory of our bodies, is first death, then resurrection.....Therefore we do not fear death. With death we get rid of the sensible body, and with resurrection we put on the spirituality of the glorious body.

If we remain in that body, we shall remain in matter, but if we take off this substance through death, we shall be qualified to the spirituality of the body in eternity. Who then among us desires to remain in dust, without being transformed into glory?!

THE SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER

This sitting was mentioned in both the Old and the New Testaments:

In the Old Testament, we read in the psalm”
*“The Lord said to my Lord,
Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”*

And here, in that sitting, He calls Him Lord, through the glory of His victory over His enemies.

And in the New Testament, the story of the Ascension in the gospel of St. Mark narrates”

“So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.”
(Mark 16:19)

This sitting appeared in the story of the martyrdom of St. Stephen, the first deacon, when he said:

“Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56).

How numerous are the references to His sitting at the right hand of The Father, in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Here

are some of them:

“ when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high having become so much better than the angels” (Hebrews 1:3-4)

see also (Heb. 8:1), and (Heb. 12:2).

Here we ask: “what is the meaning of the sitting at the right hand of The Father?”

God has neither right nor left, because He is limitless. And there is no void space at His right hand where somebody would sit, because He fills all. But the word “right hand” means power and majesty and justice, as it was said in the psalm:

*“The right hand of the Lord does valiantly,
The right hand of the Lord is exalted,
The right hand of the Lord does valiantly.” (Psalm 118: 15-16)*

The meaning is that Christ sat with the majesty and the power of The Father.

* * *

Another meaning which we understand from the Ascension:

THE END OF THE EXPRESSION: “HE MADE HIMSELF OF NO REPUTATION”

With the glorious Ascension, the expression “made Himself of no reputation” which was said about the Lord Christ, ended. (Philippians 2:7). Now He is in glory.

He had made Himself of no reputation when He incarnated *“taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.” (Philippians 2:7)*

But after His Ascension, He entered in His glory, and the expression “He sat at the right hand of The Father” means that He is abiding, that He is in perpetual glory, where there is no more making of no reputation..... the making of no reputation with which He was born in a manger, and lived poorly, having nowhere to lay His head,

“A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53-3).

Therefore, when He will come in His second advent, He will come *“with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30), (in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him” (Matt. 25:31).*

It was rather said:

“Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints” (Jude 14), “and then He will reward each according to his works.” (Matt. 16:27).

Before His second coming, Saul of Tarsus saw Him in glory (Acts 9:3). And John saw Him such: “and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.” (Rev. 1:16)

The expression “sat” means stability and continuity, because He is eternally in glory.

In His second advent He will not come to take *away the sin of the world (John 1:29)* and *“be sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21)* as it happened during His first coming, but He will come as absolute justice, leading the army of the righteous or the army of the victorious.

* * *

In the Ascension of The Lord to heaven, we say to Him: The earth is not the place where to lay Your head, but it is Your footstool (Matt. 5-35). Rather it is Your humility that makes it Your footstool!

Verily this earth does not deserve that Your feet tread upon it. And we are from the dust of this earth. Who then are we before You? Nothing...

By humbling ourselves like this before Him, it will be possible for us to be raised up to Him, because *“he who humbles himself will be exalted”* (Matt. 23:12).

MEDITATIONS ON THE ASCENSION

The Ascension gives the spirit of hope:

Who would have thought during the sufferings of the Cross, and what humiliations and scorn that were there, that He will end in that glory in the Resurrection and the Ascension and the sitting at the right hand of The Father?! Does not this give us the fullness of hope whenever we are surrounded by tribulations? Let us remember that after the sorrows of the Golgotha, there are the rejoicings of the Resurrection and the glories of the Ascension.

All the problem lies in that it is a matter that needs faith, confidence and patience.

There are people who are swallowed by tribulations whenever these happen to them, and their souls remain imprisoned inside the tribulations, as if there were no salvation!!

The lives of these people end in despair without hope, at the Golgotha; and if the story of Christ had ended with His crucifixion, we would have become the most miserable of men.

But we rejoice because the story of the Crucifixion was followed with the Resurrection, then the Ascension. In the Resurrection it was possible to destroy death, but Christ still remained on earth. While in the Ascension, He is raised up over the earth, in glory, to heaven.

The miracle of the Ascension gives us a kind of hope from

two sides:

The first one is meant for those who were scandalised by the Cross of our Lord and by the accompanying humiliations and sufferings, in that the riposte was first in the glory of the Resurrection, then in the glory of the Ascension. In that way, faith returned to those who had thought that everything ended with the Cross; and we have the hope that after every cross, there is resurrection and there is ascension. This hope accompanied the martyrs and the confessors in every generation.

The second side of hope is that we shall have the same:

Therefore, as Christ ascended with a glorious body, so we also shall have a glorious body (Philippians 3:21). And as a cloud took Him out of the sight of the Apostles in His Ascension, so we also shall come with Him on the clouds on the last day,

“at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints” (1 Thess. 3:13), when

“the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgement on all” (Jude 14-15), when He will be

“coming with clouds, and every eye will see him” (Rev. 1:7).

“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” (1 Thess. 4:17)

Verily how great is that hope!.....

* * *

This hope teaches us patience and waiting for the Lord.

Patience first in the realisation of the promises of the Lord, patience in the sufferings of the cross, until the glories of the resurrection and the glories of the ascension are accomplished.

Patience in the Ascension of the Lord leaving us with the body, until the word of the two angels to the Apostles on the

day of the Ascension are fulfilled:

“This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”
(Acts 1:11)

Such also was the patience which our fathers the Apostles had in waiting for the promise of the Lord to send to them the Holy Spirit.

It is patience with hope. It is hope full of joy in the confidence of the fulfillment of the promises of the Lord, as the Apostle said: *“rejoicing in hope”* (Romans 12:12).

* * *

The Ascension of the Lord implied three promises:

The first promise is the sending of the Holy Spirit to remain with us eternally. Thus He said to them in advance:

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you, but if I depart, I will send Him to you.” (John 16:7)

And so it happened; and He sent to them the Holy Spirit ten days after His Ascension.

As for the second promise, it is His word to them:

“I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you.” (John 14:18)

And His word also:

“I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:20)

He fulfilled this promise also, and is still fulfilling it.

The beloved Saint John saw Him in the midst of the seven churches, (Apoc. 1: 13-14), holding the angels of the seven churches “or their pastors”, in His right hand.

As for the third promise, it is His word to His Apostles:

“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” (John 12:32)

He draws us to Himself in order to lift us up to heaven, as

He said:

“I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14: 2-3)

Consequently, it is a promise that we shall be with Him, on earth and in heaven. On earth:

“I am with you always”, and “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” (Matt. 18:20)

And in heaven:

“that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:3)

And as the Apostle saint Paul said:

“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” (1 Thess. 4:17)

How great is that glory!.....

* * *

He said to His Apostles:

“that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:3)

Not on earth, but in heaven. However on earth, prepare yourself in order to be in heaven.

I was with you when I made Myself of no reputation, and you will be with Me when I enter into My glory.

Whoever can conceive this truth, and that he will be with the Lord in the likeness of a glorious body, will indubitably respect his soul, and will not debase his soul with sin, but rather he will prepare his soul to inherit the kingdom.

This glory with the Lord on the clouds and in heaven, will not be inherited by those who cling to dust, to material matters, to the earth, and those who love the world.

* * *

SOME ADVICES ON THE OCCASION OF THE ASCENSION

In the uplifting of the Lord to heaven, He has drawn our sights and our hearts also to heaven:

Therefore it was said about the Ascension of the Lord to heaven that the Apostles:

“looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up” (Acts 1:10).

That is one of the heavenly lessons to us, that we should be steadfastly looking toward heaven where the Lord has ascended, and to heaven from where He will come to us in His second advent. Also we should be steadfastly looking toward heaven where all our emotions and our hopes are concentrated all the time, in His heavenly kingdom, as the Lord said:

*“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
(Matt. 6:21)*

Those people who have all their treasures on earth, are poor, and therefore all their desires and all their hopes will be on earth. And when they leave the earth, they will not find anything.

As for the sons of God, they live always looking steadfastly toward heaven to which their hearts and all their desires cling.

May therefore our thoughts be always lifted up toward heaven.

They all mount there to be with the Lord, together with all the desires of our hearts and all our spiritual senses. And as the saint Apostle Paul said:

“while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are

temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (2 Cor. 4:18)

If we remain looking steadfastly toward heaven, looking to the things which are not seen, and all our treasure has become in heaven, then we shall say with the Apostle:

“having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.” (Philippians 1:23)

In the Feast of the Ascension, our thoughts must be lifted upwards, to contemplate the heavens to which Christ has ascended, and His sitting at the right hand of The Father.

In our contemplation of the heavens, we remember the word of the Lord:

*“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
(Matt. 6:21)*

Let your treasure therefore be in heaven; and may every person train himself to the blessing of the Ascension in his life; being lifted up from the material level to the spiritual level. His aspirations and his desires would be lifted up from the level of the body to the love of God.

Whoever, with his heart and his thought, is lifted up from the level of the earth and material things, himself will deserve to ascend and to be with Christ.

But those who cling to the earth and to material things, how can they ascend?

It is clear, even from the material point of view: whenever a man is lifted up, the earth becomes small in his sight, and all the things in it are belittled, till they become as if they were nothing.

* * *

The Feast of the Ascension teaches us also the principle of ascending.

Spiritual life, or life with the Lord, is a perpetual ascension, a constant development upwards, till we arrive at

the life of perfection. It is a continuous relationship to heaven.

The church tower gives us an idea about the direction upwards, toward heaven, and the ascension over the level of the earth and earthly things.

THE CONTEMPLATION OF GOD'S GLORY

Also in the Ascension of The Lord, we can meditate on His magnificence and His glory.

The glory of Christ in His Ascension, was a reply to all those who were scandalized during His Crucifixion.

Those who were mocking saying:

“If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we believe Him.” (Matt. 27: 40-43)

His Ascension also invigorated the faith of the Apostles who were afraid during the time of His crucifixion and His arrest. The glory of Christ in His Ascension was a reply to the Jews who saw the Cross as a stumbling block, and to the Greeks who saw the Cross as foolishness. As for us who believe in the Ascension, we see the power of God in the Cross. (1Cor. 1:23)

The Ascension was an affirmation of the glory of Christ, which they had seen on the mount of the Transfiguration, and forgotten.

Consequently we give credence to, not only The Christ who was born in a manger for cattle, but also to The Christ who ascended on the clouds to heaven. We believe also, not only Jesus who was crucified, but also we believe Him sitting at the right hand of His Father, on the throne of magnificence in the highest.

Thus we have a complementary idea of Christ, Nativity, Crucifixion, concluded with the glories of The Transfiguration,

The Resurrection and The Ascension.

Many people take the love of God, His humility, His lowliness of heart and His forgiveness, as subjects for mediation. And that is good and useful. Are there any spiritual benefits whenever we meditate on the glory and magnificence of God? Undoubtedly, for they are many sources of spiritual matters.

1. The contemplation of the glory of God, leads us to deference.

Some people may be led by their unbridled feelings of love, to a lack of reverence, saying every time they are unrestrained and conscienceless, that God is very compassionate and sympathetic, and undoubtedly He will forgive; as if forgiveness had no conditions of repentance and subservience. We are in need of the feelings of veneration, whenever we contemplate the glory and magnificence of God..... the Boundless, the Inconceivable, who is the unapproachable Light, to whom angels and archangels bow down, and worship Him... whom the cherubims and the seraphims venerate: covering their faces with two wings, and covering their feet with two wings....The Ascension plants inside us feelings of deference.

The Jews exploited the love and the forbearance of God, in a wrong manner. They exploited the modesty of Christ in order to insult Him and to crucify Him. It was indispensable for everybody to know the glory of the Lord in order to believe in Him. This glory appeared in the Ascension and in many visions.

2. And also the glory of God plants reverence and obedience in us.

And we are in need of both of them, because without both of them, we are unable to reach the perfect love that “casts out fear” (1 John 4:18); and without both of them we cannot reach the purity of heart with which we shall

see God (Matt. 5:8).

Fear is the beginning of wisdom, and the beginning of the spiritual way. Because those in whom the fear of God does not exist, may be guided to consciencelessness, and indifference, and consequently sin with impertinence.

The glory of God leads to apprehension; and this leads to the life of prudence and circumspection, and to purity and repentance.

Such as we see the kind-hearted Christ entering into Jerusalem seated on “a colt, the foal of a donkey”, we see Him also on the clouds, in order to think of Him as it is befitting.

The loving merciful compassionnate God who speaks to the prophet Elijah in a lightsome low voice, is Himself the same God sitting on the cherubims, walking on the wings of the winds, from whose dreadful glory the angels cover their faces.

* * *

While we mention His glory in the Ascension, we remember the word of saint Nicodemus:

“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)

So, heaven is not something new to Him in His Ascension, rather it is His original habitat; and in the same manner His sitting at the right hand of The Father.

Therefore He said to His Apostles:

“I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.”

(John 16:28)

Thus pertaining to His true magnificence and His being the Son of God, all have comprehended His

humility and His making himself of no reputation.

* * *

**3. This contemplation plants in our hearts,
some deep feelings, We mention:**

1. We feel at rest and confident, being at the care of such a magnificent God, and all contradictory majesty being worthless. Thus we are assured of His promise:

“and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it”

(Matt. 16:18),

and His word to the Church:

“No weapon formed against you shall prosper”

(Isaiah 54:17),

and His words to saint Paul:

“Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you” (Acts 18: 9-10).

2. The contemplation of the magnificence of the Lord, leads us to the life of humility and to the praise of God. Who are we in the presence of Him who ascends to heaven, who is sitting at the right hand of the Father (Psalm 110:1) (Acts 7:56) (Heb.1:3) who “charges His angels with error” (Job 4:18),

“the stars are not pure in his sight” (Job 25:50).

Then our souls become lowly and we learn to be humble; and when we contemplate the magnificence of the Lord in His Ascension to heaven and His sitting at the right hand of the Father, we confidently say to Him:

O Lord, Heaven is your throne to which you have ascended (Matt. 5:34),

*“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,
A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.”
(Heb. 1:8)*

As for us, we are dust. It is Your great love that attracts us to You, to be with You and with Your angels. Verily You are Him who

*“raises the poor out of the dust,
And lifts the needy out of the ash heap,
That He may seat him with princes,
With the princes of His people.”
(Psalm 113:7)*

In the story of the Ascension, we need to imagine a little from the glory of God, and to fear Him, in order to become lowly before Him and be humiliated, since we are dust and ashes.

Therefore we lift our sights to heaven during our prayers, and pray our Father who is in heaven, although He is everywhere. But the expression “who is in heaven” reminds us of His glory, and reminds us of Christ who ascended to heaven.

Thus we remember God the Powerful, the Supreme, whose throne is heaven, and whose footstool is the earth (Matt. 5: 34-35). Our lowliness during prayer, in front of the magnificence of God, is very useful to us.

THE TEN DAYS

In the Ascension, we meditate on the virtue of waiting for the Lord, like the Apostles who had waited for ten days.

Christ ascended to heaven and promised the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles. They kept waiting for ten days, in which they did not see the Lord with them, and the Holy Spirit had not come to them. But they were certain of the divine promise.

The spiritual person waits confidently, as it has been said

in the psalm:

*“Wait on the Lord,
Be of good courage,
An He shall strengthen your heart;
Wait, I say, on the Lord.”*

(Psalm 27:14)

Be confident that the ten days in which the Apostles had waited, were for their good. It was a holy period of preparation to the coming of the Holy Spirit in their heart.