

It may be that the Ascension seems like a lesser event compared to the feasts which we have just been celebrating in the church year. The Ascension is the final event in the rehearsal of Christ's redemptive acts on earth, but it is much less emphasized than many of the other feasts on the calendar. It seems, when compared to Christmas, Good Friday and Easter, as though it is the epilogue of the story. The last couple pages which close this chapter and introduce the next – the story of Christ's mystical body the Church. However, in the history of the Church's observance, the Ascension has been considered one of the highest feasts of the year – comparable to Christmas and Easter. Why is that? It is because the feast of the Ascension is not merely the closing of the book of the gospel, it is the peak and consummation of Christ's threefold work as Prophet, Priest and King. These three functions which our Lord fulfills in the act of redemption are each fully realized in the event of Christ's Ascension into Heaven.

As prophet, Christ speaks the words of God to the people of God. This has always been the function of the prophets. As God spoke through Amos, "I have also spoken to the prophets, And I gave numerous visions, And through the prophets I gave parables." And in 2 Kings it is recorded, "Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah through all His prophets and every seer..." Similarly, Jesus came to speak the words of the God to the people. Jesus is the greatest of the prophets because rather than merely communicate the words of God as he is told, he speaks with the authority of his own person. For rather than relay the Word of God, he is the Word Himself as the introduction of the Gospel of John relates. Further, whereas the prophets would preface their proclamations with the words "thus says the Lord", Jesus says "Verily, Verily, I say unto you..." He holds the authority to update the law, in the sermon on the mount contending "you have heard it said... But I say unto you". And so, Christ speaks with the authority the prophets never had in themselves. However, while Our Lord ministered on the earth he continued to operate as an external voice to the people. He called them to turn to God from the vantage of a teacher. However, it is in his Ascension that Our Lord provides for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

We read just a couple of weeks ago St. John's account of our Lord's words, " Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you... Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come." In the Creed we confess that it has always been by the Holy Ghost that prophets spoke. Yet now, with the Ascension, the Spirit is given to each to guide us in the truth and convict of sin and righteousness. No longer do we hear the words of God purely externally, but God is given to us to speak to the temptations and confusions which are particular to our lives. And so, in the Ascension, Jesus fulfills his role as prophet, giving the Comforter all the people of God.

Secondly, in the Ascension Christ completes his work as Priest. As the prophet, Jesus represented God to His people, as the Priest he represents the people to God. He stands before the people to offer Atonement for them and to interced on their behalf. This has always been the role of the Priest. He was to offer burnt offerings on behalf of the people as a sweet smelling aroma to God. Each sacrifice was an expresion of obedience and penitence which the priest presented to The Lord as a representative of the Children of Israel. Jesus once again performs the same function, but with greater authority and effect. As the author of the book of Hebrews articulates: "But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified." And in chapter 9, "But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the

greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." This most Holy Place is the throne room of Heaven, which was always what the Holy of Holies represented in the Tabernacle and the Temple. Christ offers the great atoning sacrifice on the altar of the Cross, and in the Ascension brings this offering into the Most Holy Place and continues to intercede for us on our behalf. Romans 8:34 says that Jesus "is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." He continues to perform the work of the High Priest in the Heavens.

Finally, Our Lord's Ascension is the great realization of his Kingship. Throughout the gospels Our Lord is establishing the Kingdom of Heaven. A different kind of Kingdom from what the Israelites had come to expect. They had looked for the Messiah to be a King, but they had not expected a spiritual Kingdom. This holds true even up until the Ascension. As the account we read in the book of Acts demonstrates, the Apostles still believed that Jesus would re-establish Israel, asking as they reach the Mount of Olives, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Yet, Jesus was already working the restoration of the Kingdom of God in the world. He had proven himself Lord of all things, commanding the workings of the earth and the animals, restoring health to the sick, directing Angels and Demons, having power over soldiers and leaders of all kinds. Yet, in none of these things was his Kingship fully shown. It was when Our Lord Ascends to the Throne of Heaven that he is glorified over all Creation. This Paul declared to the Ephesians, "according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:"

And as Prophet, Priest and King, he has gone to prepare for us a place to be with him. His Ascension draws us to God, makes us fit for glory, and establishes the kingdom in which we will rule with Him. We all are made participants and beneficiaries of this work by our Union with Him. And so, we celebrate the exaltation of Christ, not only as the right and just reward of the Son of God, but also because in Christ's exaltation, our glorification is secured. The Ascension of Jesus is the Seal and promise of our Ascension. It is both the symbol and promise of our own hopes. As our Lord said to the disciples after prophesying about his Ascension, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."