

21. May 2020

## “Ascension of the Lord”

*Acts 1, 1-11*

*In my earlier work, Theophilus, I dealt with everything Jesus had done and taught from the beginning until the day he gave his instructions to the apostles he had chosen through the Holy Spirit, and was taken up to heaven. He had shown himself alive to them after his Passion by many demonstrations: for forty days he had continued to appear to them and tell them about the kingdom of God. While at table with them, he had told them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for what the Father had promised. 'It is', he had said, 'what you have heard me speak about: John baptised with water but, not many days from now, you are going to be baptised with the Holy Spirit. Now having met together, they asked him, 'Lord, has the time come for you to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know times or dates that the Father has decided by his own authority but you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to earth's remotest end. As he said this he was lifted up while they looked on, and a cloud took him from their sight. They were still staring into the sky as he went, when suddenly two men in white were standing beside them, and they said, 'Why are you Galileans standing here looking into the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come back in the same way as you have seen him go to heaven.*

In Jerusalem, in the eastern part of the city, on the Mount of Olives, there is a small chapel. It is administered by Muslims, so it is only honoured with liturgies on one day of the year - on Ascension Day. In this chapel there are footprints in the stone, which are said to be from Jesus, and so this place is considered to be the place of the Ascension of Jesus. Not far from there is an Ascension Church, under the supervision of the Orthodox Patriarchate. Sisters live there in a convent.

In the immediate vicinity of the Ascension site is the so-called Paternoster Church, today a Carmelite monastery. At this place the Lord is said to have taught the disciples the Lord's Prayer (*cf. Lk 11,1-4*) and to have spoken with them about the Last Days (*cf. Mt 24,3-51*).

If one knows these places, and through my frequent stays in Jerusalem they have come close to me- then these described events become very present. One can almost

perceive then how Jesus spoke to his disciples without leaving them in doubt about the course of salvation history. Even if he did not specify times and dates in which the Kingdom of God will be restored (*cf. Mt 24,36*), he, as the Risen One, gave clear instructions on what to do so that the Kingdom of God may spread. In the power of the proclaimed Holy Spirit, the apostles shall be “*witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to earth's remotest end.*”

That is enough, and it is the essential thing for the apostles. The speculations about when the end of times will be lead away from what the commission is. Of course we are invited by the Lord to recognize the signs of the times, to interpret them and to give the right answer. But this is always to devote ourselves all the more to the task of proclaiming the gospel and bearing credible witness - with greater zeal the nearer the time of the Second Coming of Christ comes, and it is towards this time that we are heading, as the present text testifies to us.

Today's real event of the Lord's ascension to heaven took place just before their eyes when the Lord reaffirmed their mission. As with the Resurrection of Jesus, this is a real, historical event, and not just a symbolism, as some theologians think. The disciples should see and testify to the fact and it is included in the creed of the church! It is different at the Ascension than at the Resurrection of the Lord, at which - according to the testimony of Holy Scripture - no human witness was present, but the Risen One later showed himself to those whom he had chosen for it.

At the Ascension of the Lord, however, the disciples could directly follow the event. With the angels two heavenly witnesses were added, who confirmed the fact of the Ascension and pointed out to the disciples the visible return of the Lord. For us believers the Ascension of the Lord is an important message, it is the return of Jesus to the Father. Everything that Jesus has said will happen according to his word. It is his and our home, which he prepares for us with our Father in heaven. So we can live in the hope and faith that everything is prepared for us when the time of our death has come.

Also the message of the Second Coming of the Lord, which the angels confirm, can inspire us to spend the short time of our life in extreme fruitfulness. Like our life, history is also coming to an end, and this end will be completely bathed in the light of God. The devil will be thrown into the lake of fire and the redeemed will sing the song of the Lamb (*cf. Rev 20,10; 15,3*).

The Lord wants to put all this before our eyes and it is as if he were calling out to us too: "Hurry, the time is near, do not lose time! Many people are still waiting to get to know me: you do not need to know times or deadlines, but in the power of the Holy Spirit you must bear witness!"