

Ascension of the Lord, Yr. C, Xavier Church, Acts 1, 1-11; Ps. 47, 2-3. 6-9; Heb. 9, 24-28; 10, 19-23; Lk. 24, 46-53

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Brothers and sisters, heaven is not just a symbol or a romantic image. In the Letter to the Hebrews, in the second reading, we learn that Christ entered heaven itself, and not a sanctuary that is merely a symbol, a model of the true sanctuary. If heaven is not just a symbol, then what is it? The Catechism says: 'Heaven is the perfect life together with the most holy Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed. Heaven is the ultimate goal and realisation of man's deepest desires, the highest and definitive state of happiness.'

The letter to the Hebrews explains how this state of happiness can be achieved. The writer speaks of the blood of Jesus, through which we have free access to the sanctuary. Jesus appeared at the climax of history and sacrificed Himself for our sins. He is now that high priest who has been appointed over the house of God. As for us, we know that we have to die once and then the judgement comes. What we hear in the Bible readings today is that we can entrust ourselves to that high priest Jesus. By remaining in his love, we remain on that road that leads to heaven.

However, we must prepare ourselves for this. If we notice that we feel guilty about something, then it is important to resolve that, to wash our bodies clean again, as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews puts it. He who made the promises is trustworthy.

And it is also important to testify of the hope that lives in us. The end of the Gospel according to Luke, which we have just heard, speaks of Jesus blessing the disciples. As He does so, He is taken up to heaven. In the Acts of the Apostles, it says that this happened forty days after Jesus had risen from the dead. During those forty days He appeared to the disciples and spoke to them about the Kingdom of God.

Jesus promised his disciples that they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. This is what happens at Pentecost. Jesus asks his disciples to stay in the city until they are equipped with power from on high. This is also good advice for today.

Before you start something new, first consider in prayer whether it is indeed the right choice. To ask for strength to bring it to fulfilment.

The time between Ascension Day and Pentecost, nine days, is a time to pray for the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts again. And then to be able to bear witness to it. In earlier days, this was almost self-evident. From our country, many missionaries, priests, brothers and sisters went to the ends of the earth to proclaim the Gospel. And here, the churches were full to pray for them. Now that is different. But the challenge is

no less. The need to hear the liberating word of the Lord is still high. In China, in India, in Nigeria and in so many other places, people are yearning for the gospel, for the Good News about heaven and earth. In Ukraine, people fight for their freedom of speech, the freedom not to have another culture imposed on them by brutal force. But also here in our own country, many people are longing for a completely different perspective, for the hope of that other, invisible 'place' where happiness does not pass them by. Especially many young people no longer have the words to express their hope for such a lasting happiness, their belief in a better reality. Many young people feel lonely and without perspective. Many take refuge in drink or drugs. Our faith transcends the daily superficiality that we so often have to deal with. It gives depth to our lives and connects us with each other. Let us then pray fervently for the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Helper, who will equip us with new strength to be Jesus' witnesses to our brothers and sisters. Amen.