

## Ascension Thursday, 2019

1. **For forty days now the Risen Christ has accompanied us accustoming us to the reality of his risen body.** During this time Jesus was training us to live with his risen presence which we cannot always see but know for certain is present to us. There are no forty days between the Ascension and Pentecost. So what is Jesus trying to train us to do? **To have both!** First we must witness the power of that glory in his risen body first hand. Then we will be ready to welcome the power of that glory into our bodies at Pentecost. We need both for the journey to heaven: **The certainty that his risen life is at work in our bodies and the experience of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.**
2. **The power of the risen Christ is best seen in the lives of the early martyrs.** We read in Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History of the martyrdom of Alexander, a Phrygian and a physician and Attalus, a Christian from Pergamum. Alexander had stood by as a witness encouraging those who once denied Christ now to be faithful to him. The crowds noticed his success and demanded his martyrdom. Attalus had been paraded around the amphitheatre the day before with a placard carried before him, "**This is Attalus, the Christian.**" When the time came for their martyrdom, after enduring all kinds of torture, they were finally sacrificed. Alexander uttered not a sound, communicating with God in his heart, while Attalus, when roasting in the iron chair with the stench rising from his body, told the crowd in Latin: "Look! Eating men is what you are doing! We neither eat people nor commit any crimes!" **The life of the risen Christ in their bodies gave them superhuman courage to endure their tortures for the love of Christ.**
3. **For ourselves, not called yet to endure such torture, we see at work in our bodies, if we are truly living the life of faith, a power over the forces of sin** which normally overcome others. We experience an inexplicable shift in our attitudes which differ greatly from others who do not believe in Christ. For example, my exercise of patience is not just gritting my teeth until a hardship is over but a quiet waiting, like pushing open the heavy door that lets in the glory of the sanctuary! My endurance of setbacks and failures does not become depression like a long overcast rainy week of cold, dull weather, but the anticipation of a birth that is slowly happening in my body! **I learn to stop avoiding, checking out of reality but rather plunge into the joys and sorrows of this life** knowing that as I do so, the transformation accomplished in the Ascension is being accomplished in my body, during my lifetime, and with my participation!
4. **As Lord of heaven and of earth in his humanity, the Risen and Ascended Jesus remains present to our life and times** and guides the personal history of each soul and the whole world, through the Holy Spirit: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and then you will be my witnesses... to the ends of the world." (Acts 1:8)
5. **In his Ascension Jesus also becomes the only universal and eternal intercessor before God for all humanity, past, present and future, and we become intercessors with him:** "In other words, brothers, through the blood of Jesus we

have the right to enter the sanctuary by a new way which he has opened for us, a living opening through the curtain, that is to say, his body." (Heb 10:19) **We are filled with hope because we can always speak to God himself about anything and everything we suffer on earth**, certain that he hears and acts on our behalf. Fruits of hope are the fruits of the mystery of the Ascension in us! **Do we exercise such confidence for ourselves and others?**

6. **The weapon that confronts the uncertainty of the future is prayer, hope, trust and action born of these three.** What hinders our passage from hope to trust? We lean on money, power, and possessions to give us security. When we lack any of these a little we start complaining. Today people complain a lot about these things because they lack hope. So hope has to do with not-possessing, with being weak, with being poor! Poverty, trust, and emptiness can become ways to live the mystery of the Ascension!
7. **The Ascension unleashes both the power of Christ's Risen life and the power of his intercession through us.** This is why it is deeply connected with the social outreach of the Church. The Ascension gives the Church all her social commitments, which aim at the transformation of earthly realities into heavenly ones. **Without the mystery of the Ascension the social teaching of the Church would make no sense.** The Church is sure that her works of mercy are not just dreams or fruitless efforts. Her members witness the power of the Ascension in their flesh and want to extend that power to all people. In the Incarnation, God used human flesh to have access to us. In the Ascension, the

Father uses the glorified flesh of the Son and our flesh, united to him, to be a portal to the heavenly sanctuary.

8. **And so we come to the Eucharist which is this portal into the sanctuary.** Here we are joined to the power of the risen Christ and here we are trained to become courageous witnesses to the Resurrection and trained to be powerful intercessors who are fearless before the challenges of life.