

Rev. Fr. Leonard Goffine's
The Church's Year

INSTRUCTION ON THE FESTIVAL OF THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD



At the Introit the Church sings the words which were spoken by the angels to the apostles and disciples, after the Ascension of our Lord:

INTROIT Ye men of Galilee, why wonder you, looking up to heaven? allel.: He shall so come as you have seen him going up into heaven. Allel., allel., allel. (Acts I. 11.), Oh, clap your hands, all ye nations; shout unto God with the voice of joy. (Ps. XLVI. 2.) Glory be to the Father, etc.

COLLECT Grant, we beseech Thee, O Almighty God, that we who believe Thy only-begotten Son, our Redeemer, to have this day ascended into the heavens, may ourselves also in, mind dwell amid heavenly things. Through the same etc.

LESSON (Acts I. 1-11.) The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, of all things which Jesus began to do and to teach, until the day on which, giving commandments by the Holy Ghost to the apostles, whom he had chosen, he was taken up: to whom also he showed himself alive after his passion, by many proofs, for forty days appearing to them, and speaking of the kingdom of God. And eating together with them, he commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but should wait for the promise of the Father, which you have heard (saith he) by my mouth: for John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not

many days hence. They, therefore, who were come together, asked him, saying: Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? But he said to them: It is not for you to know the times or moments which the Father hath put in his own power; but you shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you, and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even to the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had said these things, while they looked on, he was raised up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they were beholding him going up to heaven, behold, two men stood by them in white garments, who also said: Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking up to heaven? This Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, as you have seen him going into heaven.

EXPLANATION This gospel of St. Luke addressed to Theophilus, a Christian of note in Antioch, contains an account of the life, sufferings, and death of Jesus up to the time of His ascension into heaven. The Evangelist continues his account in the Acts of the apostles, in which he describes in simple words that which Jesus did during the forty days following His Resurrection, and the manner in which He ascended into heaven in the presence of His apostles. Rejoice that Christ today has entered into the glory gained by His sufferings and death, and pray: I rejoice, O King of heaven and earth, in the glory Thou hast this day attained in heaven. Sing to God, ye kingdoms of the earth: sing ye to the Lord: sing ye to God, who mounteth above the heaven of heavens to the east. Give ye glory to God for Israel, his magnificence and his power is in the clouds. God is wonderful in his saints, the God of Israel is he who will give power and strength to his people, blessed be God. (Ps.LXVII. 33-36.)

GOSPEL (Mark. XVI. 14-20.) At that time, Jesus appeared to the eleven as they were at table: and he upbraided them with their incredulity and hardness of heart, because they did not believe them who had seen him after he was risen again. (And he said to them: Go ye into the whole world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be condemned: And these signs shall follow them that believe. In my name they shall cast out devils: they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents: and if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them: they shall lay their hands upon the sick; and they shall recover.) And the Lord Jesus after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God. But they going forth preached everywhere, the Lord working withal, and confirming the word with signs that followed.

The part of this gospel which is within the marks of parenthesis, is the gospel for the feast of St. Francis Xavier.

Why did Christ say to His apostles: Go ye into the whole world and preach the gospel to all creatures?

To show that no one is to assume the office of preaching, but must look for his mission from the lawful pastors of the Church. And when Christ sends His apostles into the whole world to all nations without exception, He shows His willingness to save all men. If the designs of God are not fulfilled, the blame is not to be attributed to God, but to man, who either does not accept the doctrine of the gospel, or accepting, does not live in accordance with it, or else renders himself by his obduracy in vice, unworthy of the gospel.

Is faith without good works sufficient for salvation?

No, faith that is not active in love, not fruitful in good works, and therefore not meritorious, (Gal. V. 6.) is not sufficient for salvation. "Such faith," says St. Anselm, "is not the faith of a Christian, but the faith of the devil." Only he who truly believes in Christ and His doctrine, and lives in accordance with it, will be saved.

Is ours then the true faith since all the faithful do not work miracles; as Christ has predicted?

St. Gregory very beautifully replies to this question: "Because the Redeemer said that true faith would be accompanied by miracles, you must not think that you have not the faith, because these signs do not follow; these miracles had to be wrought in the beginning of the Church, because faith in her had to be increased by these visible signs of divine power." And even now when such signs are necessary for the propagation of the faith, and victory over unbelief, God gives His faithful power to work them.

Are miracles wrought now in the Catholic Church?

Yes, for there have been at all times saints in the Church, who, as seen from their lives, have wrought miracles, on account of their faith, which even the heretics cannot deny; for instance St. Francis Xavier, who in the sight of the heathens, raised several dead persons to life. In a spiritual manner all pious Catholics still work such miracles; for, as St. Chrysostom says, "they expel devils when they banish sin, which is worse than the devil; they speak new tongues when they converse no longer on vain and sinful things, but on those which are spiritual and heavenly." "They take up serpents," says St. Gregory, "when by zealous exhortations they lift others from the shame of vice, without being themselves poisoned; they drink deadly things without being hurt by them, when they hear improper conversation without being corrupted or led to evil; they lay their hands upon the sick and heal them, when they teach the ignorant, strengthen by their good example those who are wavering in virtue, keep the sinner from evil, and similar things." Strive to do this upon all occasions, O Christian, for God willingly gives you His grace and you will thus be of more use to yourself and others, and honor God more than by working the greatest miracles.

Where and how did Christ ascend into heaven?

From Mount Olivet where His sufferings began, by which we learn, that where our crosses and afflictions begin which we endure with patience and resignation, there begins our reward. Christ ascended into heaven by His own power, because He is God, and now in His glorified humanity He sits at the right hand of His Father, as our continual Mediator.

In whose presence did Christ ascend into heaven?

In the presence of His apostles, and many of His disciples, whom He had previously blessed, (Luke XXIV. 51.) and who, as St. Leo says, derived consoling joy from His ascension. Rejoice, also, O Christian soul, for Christ has today opened heaven for you, and you may enter it, if you believe in Christ, and live in accordance with that faith. St. Augustine says: "Let us ascend in spirit with Christ, that when His day comes, we may follow with our body.

Yet you must know, beloved brethren, that not pride, nor avarice, nor impurity, nor any other vice ascends with Christ; for with the teacher of humility pride ascends not, nor with the author of goodness, malice, nor with the Son of the Virgin, impurity. Let us then ascend with Him by

trampling upon our vices and evil inclinations, thus building a ladder by which we can ascend; for we make a ladder of our sins to heaven when we tread them down in combating them:"

ASPIRATION O King of glory! O powerful Lord! who hast this day ascended victoriously, above all heaven, leave us not as poor orphans; but send us, from the Father, the Spirit of truth whom Thou hast promised. Alleluia.

Why is the paschal candle extinguished after the gospel on this day?

To signify that Christ, of whom the candle is a figure, has gone from His disciples.

INSTRUCTION ON MIRACLES

And these signs shall follow them that believe.(Mark XVI. 17.)

What is a miracle?

A miracle, as defined by St. Thomas of Aquin, is anything beyond the ordinary, fixed state of things that is done through God. Thus when the sun stands still in his course, when thousands are fed with five loaves and two small fishes, when by a word or simple touch the dead are raised to life, the blind see, and the deaf hear, these are things contrary to nature, and are miracles which can only be performed by God or those persons to whom God has given the power.

That God can work miracles, cannot be denied. God has made the laws of nature, and at any time it pleases Him, He can suddenly suspend them, and that God has at times done so, we have more solid and undeniable proofs, than we have for the most renowned and best authenticated facts of history, far more witnesses testify to miracles, the whole world has believed them, and been converted by them; more than eleven millions of martyrs have died to confirm and maintain their truth; no one gives up his life for lies and deceptions; the Jews and pagans have admitted them, but ascribed them to witchcraft and the power of demons rather than to God; by this they proved and acknowledged the truth of miracles, because in order to deny them, they were driven to false and absurd explanation of them.

Can men work miracles?

No; only God works miracles through man to whom He gives the power. The history of the Christian Church in all ages bears testimony, that men have wrought miracles in the name of Jesus, as, for example, the apostles and the saints.

Can miracles be worked by the relics of saints, pictures, &c.?

The Church, in the Council of Trent, solemnly declares, that we are never to believe that there is in any picture or relic any hidden power by which a miracle can, be worked, and that we are not to honor or ask any such thing of them. Therefore no miracle can ever be worked by them, but God can perform miracles through them, and He has done so, as the holy Scriptures and the history of the Church of Christ both prove. But when through certain pictures (usually called miraculous pictures) miracles do take place, that no deception may occur, the Church commands that such a picture shall not be exposed for the veneration of the faithful, until the truth of the miracles

performed is by a rigorous examination established beyond doubt; she then causes such pictures to be respectfully preserved as monuments of the goodness and omnipotence of God.

Why are there not so many miracles in our times as there were in the first days of the Church?

Because the Church is no longer in need of such extraordinary testimony to the truth of her teachings. Thus St. Augustine writes: "He who in the face of the conversion of the world to Christianity demands miracles, and strives to doubt those which have been wrought in favor of this most wonderful change, is himself an astonishing miracle of irrationality and stupidity;" and St. Chrysostom says: "The question is sometimes asked: How happens it there are not so many miracles now-a-days? The answer is, because the knowledge of Christ is propagated all over the earth, and the Church is like a tree which, having once taken deep root and grown to a certain height, no longer needs to be carefully watered and supported."