

## TOPIC 11: RESURRECTION, ASCENSION AND SECOND COMING

### 1. Christ was buried and descended into hell.

After suffering and dying, Christ's body was buried in a new tomb, not far from the place where he had been crucified. His soul, on the other hand, descended into hell. Christ's burial showed that he truly died. God ordained that Christ should undergo the condition of death, that is, the separation of the soul from the body (cf. *Catechism*, 624). While he remained in the tomb, both his soul and his body, though separated from each other by death, continued being united to his divine Person (cf. *Catechism*, 626)

Because Christ's dead body continued to belong to the divine Person, it did not undergo the corruption of the tomb (cf. *Catechism*, 627, Acts 13:37). Christ's soul went down into hell. "This 'hell' was different from the *hell* of the damned. It was the state of all those, righteous and evil, who died before Christ" (*Compendium*, 125). The just lived in a state of happiness (they rested in "Abraham's bosom"), though they still did not have the vision of God. By the phrase "went down into hell," we understand Christ's being present in "Abraham's bosom" so as to open heaven's gates to the just who had gone before him. "With his soul united to his divine Person Jesus went down to the just in hell who were awaiting their Redeemer so they could enter at last into the vision of God" (*Compendium*, 125).

With his descent into hell, Christ displayed his dominion over the devil and death by freeing the holy souls who were retained there and bringing them to eternal glory. Thus the Redemption, which had to reach the men and women of all epochs, was applied to those who had gone before Christ (cf. *Catechism*, 634).

### 2. General meaning of Christ's glorification

Christ's glorification consists in his Resurrection and his Exaltation in heaven, where he is seated at the right hand of the Father. The general meaning of Christ's glorification is tied to his death on the Cross. Just as by Christ's Passion and Death, God abolished sin and reconciled the world to himself, so likewise, by Christ's Resurrection, God inaugurated the life of the future world and put it at mankind's disposition.

The blessings of salvation stem not only from the Cross, but also from Christ's Resurrection. These fruits are applied to men through the Church's mediation and the Sacraments. Specifically, through Baptism, we receive pardon for our sins (both original sin and personal sins) and are clothed in the new life of the Risen One.

### 3. Resurrection of Jesus Christ

"On the third day" (of his death), Jesus was raised to a new life. His body and soul, completely transfigured with the glory of his divine Person, were reunited. His soul once again animated his body, and the glory of his soul was communicated to his entire body. Therefore, "the Resurrection of Christ was not a return to earthly life. His risen body is that which was

crucified and bears the marks of his passion. However it also participates in the divine life, with the characteristics of a glorified body” (*Compendium*, 129).

The Lord’s Resurrection is the foundation of our faith, since it attests beyond any doubt to the fact that God has intervened in human history in order to save mankind. And it guarantees the truth of what the Church preaches about God, about the divinity of Christ and the salvation he brings. As St Paul says, *if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is futile* (1 Cor 15:17).

The Apostles could hardly have been deceived, or have invented the Resurrection. First of all, if Christ’s tomb had not been empty, they wouldn’t have ventured to speak of the Resurrection; furthermore, if Jesus had not appeared to them on various occasions and also to many others, both men and women, many of Christ’s disciples would not have been able to accept it, as initially happened with the Apostle Thomas. Still less would they have been willing to give up their lives for a lie. As St Paul says: *If Christ has not been raised ... we are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise* (1 Cor 15: 14, 15). And when the Jewish authorities wished to silence the preaching of the Gospel, St Peter replied: *We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. .... And we are witnesses to these things* (Acts 5:29-30, 32)

Besides being an historical event, verified and attested to by signs and testimonies, Christ’s Resurrection is a transcendent happening, because “insofar as it is the entrance of Christ’s humanity into the glory of God, (it) transcends and surpasses history as a mystery of faith” (*Compendium*, 128). Therefore, the risen Jesus, though still possessing a true, physical, corporal identity, is not subject to physical, earthly laws, except when he so wills: “the risen Jesus was utterly free to appear to his disciples how and where he wished and under various aspects” (*Compendium*, 129).

Christ’s Resurrection is a mystery of salvation. It shows the goodness and love of God who rewards the self-lowering of his Son, and with his omnipotence imbues mankind with life. The Risen Jesus possesses the fullness of divine life in his humanity so that he might communicate it to men and women. “The risen Christ, the conqueror of sin and death, is the principle of our justification and our Resurrection. The Resurrection procures for us now the grace of filial adoption, which is a real share in the life of the only begotten Son. At the end of time he will raise up our bodies” (*Compendium*, 131). Christ is the first-born among the dead and we too will rise again through Him and in Him.

From our Lord’s Resurrection we should draw:

a) A living faith: “Stir up your faith! Christ is not a figure of the past. He is not a memory lost in history. He lives! *‘Jesus Christus heri et hodie: ipse et in saecula!’* As St Paul says ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today—yes, and forever!’”<sup>1</sup>

b) Hope: “Never despair. Lazarus was dead and decaying: *‘iam foetet, quatrduanus est enim’*—by now he will smell; this is the fourth day,’ Mary told Jesus. If you hear the inspiration of God and follow it—*‘Lazare, veni foras!’*—‘Lazarus, come forth!’—you will return to Life.”<sup>2</sup>

c) The desire that grace and charity might transform us and lead us to live a supernatural life, which is the life of Christ—in other words, to truly strive to be saints (cf. Col 3:1 & ff.) And also the desire to be cleansed of our sins in the Sacrament of Penance, which enables us to rise

again to supernatural life (if we have lost it through mortal sin) and begin anew: *nunc coepi* (Ps 76:11).

#### **4. Christ's glorious exaltation: "He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father."**

The glorious exaltation of Christ comes about through his Ascension into heaven, which took place forty days after his Resurrection (cf. Acts 1:9-10), and his glorious enthronement in heaven, to share as man the Father's glory and power, and to be Lord and King of creation.

When we make our confession of faith in this article of the Creed that Christ "is seated at the right hand of the Father," "by this expression we understand the glory and honor of the divinity, where he who existed as Son of God before all ages, indeed as God, of one being with the Father, is seated bodily after he became incarnate and his flesh was glorified."<sup>3</sup>

With the Ascension, the mission of the Redeemer—the sending of Christ among men in human flesh to bring about their salvation—comes to an end. After his Resurrection, Jesus continued his presence among us so as to manifest his new life and complete the disciples' formation. But this presence ends on the day of the Ascension. However, when he returns to heaven to be with the Father, Jesus nevertheless stays with us in other ways, principally in a sacramental manner through the Holy Eucharist.

The Ascension is the sign of Jesus' new condition. He goes up to heaven to share the Father's throne, not only as the eternal Son of God, but also insofar as he is true man, the victor over sin and death. The glory that he had bodily received with the Resurrection is now completed with his public enthronement in heaven as Sovereign of creation, alongside the Father. Jesus also receives the homage and praise of the blessed in heaven.

Since Christ came into the world to redeem us from sin and lead us to perfect communion with God, his Ascension inaugurates humanity's entrance into heaven. Jesus is the supernatural Head of mankind, as Adam was in the order of nature. Since our Head is in heaven, we who are his members have the real possibility of reaching heaven too. Moreover, he has gone to prepare a place for us in the Father's house (cf. Jn 14:3).

Seated at the right hand of the Father, Jesus continues his ministry as universal Mediator of salvation. "He is the Lord who now in his humanity reigns in the everlasting glory of the Son of God and constantly intercedes for us before the Father. He sends us his Spirit and he gives us the hope of one day reaching the place he has prepared for us" (*Compendium*, 132).

Indeed, ten days after his Ascension into heaven, Jesus sent the disciples the Holy Spirit as he had promised. Since then, Jesus continually sends the Holy Spirit to mankind to give them the life-giving power he possesses and gather them together in the Church, so they might form one people of God.

After the Lord's Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the Virgin Mary was raised in body and soul to heaven, for it was fitting that the Mother of God, who had carried God in her womb, should not undergo corruption in the tomb, in imitation of her Son.<sup>4</sup>

The Church celebrates the feast of our Lady's Assumption on August 15. "The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a singular participation in her Son's Resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians" (*Catechism*, 966)

The glorious Exaltation of Christ:

a) Encourages us to live with our gaze fixed on the glory of Heaven: *quae sursum sunt, quaerite* (Col 3:1); to remember that *here we have no lasting city* (Heb 13:14); and to strive to sanctify all human realities;

b) Impels us to live by faith, since we know that we are accompanied by Jesus Christ, who knows and loves us from heaven and who continually gives us the grace of his Spirit. With God's strength we are able to carry out the apostolic work entrusted to us, and help bring all souls to him (cf. Mt 28: 19) and place Christ at the summit of all human activities (cf. Jn 12:32), so that his Kingdom might become a reality (cf. 1 Cor 15:25). Furthermore, he always accompanies us from the Tabernacle.

### **5. The Second Coming of Christ: "From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead."**

Christ the Lord is King of the universe, but all created realities are not yet subject to him (cf. Heb 2:7; 1 Cor 15:28). He gives men and women time to prove their love and fidelity. But his definitive triumph will take place at the end of time when the Lord will appear *with power and great glory* (cf. Lk 21:27).

Christ has not revealed the time of his Second Coming (cf. Acts 1:7), but he encourages us always to be vigilant; and he tells us that before this Second Coming, or *parusia*, a final assault by the devil will take place with great calamities and other signs (cf. Mt 24:20-30; *Catechism*, 674-675).

Then Christ will come as Supreme and Merciful Judge to judge the living and the dead. This is the *universal judgment*, when the secrets of each one's heart will be revealed, along with each person's conduct towards God and neighbor. This judgment will confirm the sentence each person received at death. All men and women, according to their deeds, will be filled with life, or condemned for eternity. Thus will the Kingdom of God be consummated, *that God may be everything to every one* (1 Cor 15:28).

In the final judgment, the saints will receive, publicly, the reward they merited for the good they did. Justice will thereby be reestablished, since in this life it often happens that those who do evil are praised, while those who do good are despised or forgotten.

"The message of the Last Judgment calls men to conversion while God is still giving them 'the acceptable time....the day of salvation' (2 Cor 6:2). It inspires a holy fear of God and commits them to the justice of the Kingdom of God. It proclaims the 'blessed hope' (Tit 2:13) of the Lord's return when he will come 'to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at in all who have believed' (2 Thess 1:10)." (*Catechism*, 1041)

### **Basic Bibliography**

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 638-679; 1038-1041.

### **Recommended Reading**

John Paul II, *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, Catechesis: 25 January 1989; 1 February 1989; 22 February 1989; 1 March 1989; 8 March 1989; 15 March 1989.

John Paul II, *The Ascension of Jesus Christ*, Catechesis: 5 April 1989; 12 April 1989; 19 April 1989.

St. Josemaria, Homily “The Ascension of our Lord,” in *Christ Is Passing By*, 117-126.

<sup>1</sup> St Josemaria, *The Way*, 584.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 719.

<sup>3</sup> St John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*, 4. 2: PG 94, 1104; cf. *Catechism*, 663.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Pius XII, Const. *Munificentissimus Deus*, 15 August 1950: DS 3903.