

“God is king over the nations; God reigns on His holy throne.”

Ps 46:9

Last Thursday the Blessed Carlo Acutis Group spent an hour and a half talking about the Ascension of Our Lord and some of its implications, and didn't even get further than the fact that Our Lord's ascension was bodily! Like all of the major festivals in the Church's year, the Ascension is astonishingly rich in meaning and symbolism, so we could choose any one of a number of ideas to look at today. For example, we live in an age where even a popular European musical festival seems to be more about making vulgar lifestyle statements than about the quality of the songs on offer. Given that one of this year's songs is called 'No Rules,' we shouldn't be surprised at the moral degeneracy we see in the world around us. So it is, perhaps, fitting to remind ourselves of the huge disparity between the kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom of God.

The truth is, we live by rules. God made the whole of the created order, and governs it, according to rules: the rules of physics, and chemistry, and biology all ensure that things are orderly, and that we do not, for example, float above the earth but are grounded by the law of gravity.

Our bodies are governed by anatomical rules which take doctors years to learn all about. When those rules get broken, medicine or surgical procedures are needed to get things back on track again.

Society is governed by rules. We can easily imagine the chaos if we each chose which side of the road to drive on.

Yet it is part of our fallen human nature always to want to challenge rules, to think that they do not apply to us, or that rules are being imposed unjustly, which, of course, does indeed sometimes happen.

But with God's rules, things are different. God's rules are more like a manufacturer's set of instructions. God made us; and if we are to function as He intended then we need to keep His rules. If we are to find true interior peace and a lasting state of blessedness, then we need to bring our lives into conformity with His life. As has been so often quoted (from St Augustine's *Confessions*), 'You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts shall not rest until they rest in you.'

The feast of the Ascension sees Our Lord return to heaven to be seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there, Christ is King over the nations, and reigns on His holy throne. But in what way can we say that He reigns if so many of us ignore His authority and disobey His statutes so much of the time?

'My kingdom,' He said to Pontius Pilate, 'is not of this world' (Jn 18:36). The way in which God rules is different from the way in which earthly rulers govern. God's governance is called Divine Providence.

Divine Providence is the name we give to the way God's hand guides and steers all things so that the path of each created being is ordered towards the final outcome for which that particular creature was made in the first place. When an apple tree produces apples, it has arrived at the outcome for which God originally intended it.

It is only when a human being has finally arrived in heaven that he will have accomplished the outcome for which God created him in the first place. In the meantime, God orders that person's life towards that goal. The funny thing is that we so often kick against the good ordering of God's merciful and just love. We always want to do things our way instead of His, just as Adam and Eve wanted to do things their way in the Garden of

Eden. And when we do things our way we end up taking the wrong path. God never condones our wrong actions, and yet He chooses to work *with* whatever we give Him and turns us around until we have been brought back onto the right path once more... if we let Him.

Divine Providence works a little bit like the satnav in your car. If you take a wrong turn, the satnav recalculates the route and, working with your wrong turn – working *with* what you have given it – finds an alternative route which will take you back onto the right road. That's what God does. He works *with* whatever we give Him. Paradoxically, He even works with the sins we give Him (whilst never condoning or blessing those sins of course). He works with whatever we give Him and finds a way to get us back onto the right path so that we can continue our journey to heaven.

This is the manner of God's rule over the nations; this is the way He reigns on His holy throne.

But for this to be effective – for us to end up in heaven – we have to co-operate with this working of Divine Providence, and *engage* in the work of our own salvation. Our Lord has gone before us into heaven, but if we were stubbornly to ignore the satnav He has given us then it would be unlikely that we would ever be able to follow Him and find our own way home, to that home which God had always intended from the outset should be ours too.