

**“God’s love for us was revealed... so that we could have life through Him.”**

***1 Jn 4:9***

We continue our look at the idea that the Catholic Faith is all about the sanctification and salvation of our souls, and to unpack ways in which we can be active in our own growth in holiness. Two things in particular can shape our thoughts this weekend. First, the fact that May is the month of Mary. Second, that this week sees the feast of Our Lord’s Ascension back into heaven.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the model of what we mean by loving God and the things of God, as we say at the head of our newsletter every week. Here, ‘things’ include the Mass and the Sacraments, the Christian virtues, as well as the dogmas and doctrines of the Catholic Church, and indeed the Church Herself, the Mystical Body of Christ. But it also means those who are God’s friends, the angels, the saints, and above all, Our Blessed Lady. She who is the Mystical Rose and Cause of our Joy is the one whom we find it easiest to approach with delight, and eagerness, and affection. Who does not love Our Blessed Lady! Whose face does not light up whenever we come into her company?

And it is in this sense that the Virgin Mary is the model of what we mean when we talk about loving God and the things of God. The eagerness and joy with which Mary ran to her kinswoman Elizabeth to break the news to her that she, the lowly handmaid from an obscure village called Nazareth, was to be the Mother of God, provides a pattern for us to follow. Just as we go *to* Mary with great joy, so we go *with* her to shout from the rooftops the exhilarating news that Almighty God has come into the world to free us from sin, to raise us up, and to take us with Him when He returns once more to heaven.

And that is what the feast of the Ascension is all about. On Thursday, forty days after Easter Sunday, we celebrate Our Lord's ascension back into heaven following His resurrection from the dead. As with all feasts, we do not just recall this event, or celebrate it. Rather, through the sacramental nature of the Church's liturgy, we are actually drawn into the reality of Our Lord's ascension and become participants in His return to the Father and sharers in His glory, seated – as He now is – at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

This means that by coming to Mass on the feast of the Ascension our personal and individual participation in Christ's Kingly glory is renewed and deepened, and we become more closely conformed to the likeness of Christ in glory. This, in the end, is what our holy religion is all about: our being rescued from sin and the consequences of sin, and being raised up to be, as St Paul says elsewhere, coheirs with Christ to all the blessings and graces of the heavenly places, so that suffering with Christ on the Cross we may be glorified with Him in heaven (Rom 8:16-17; Eph 1:3).

It is for this reason that the feast of the Ascension is a Holy Day of Obligation: not because the Catholic Church just likes laying down the law and telling people what to do, but because it is our active participation in the Church's liturgy that actually makes us sharers in the Mysteries that we celebrate. It is as if the liturgy – with all its rubrics and ceremonies – is a window through which we are drawn into the holiness of God.

And that brings us nicely back to our main theme, namely our sanctification, our growth in holiness. In Matthew's Gospel, Our Lord explains that He will only speak to the people in parables. What He is getting at is that if anyone really wants to be a follower of His then he or she must actively engage with Christ and with the message He has come to reveal. Anyone might hear the Word of God, and it might variously go over a person's head, as it were, or in one ear and out the other. Or someone might hear what is spoken and, like

watching an episode of a television soap opera or drama series, pay attention only for as long as the episode lasts, and then forget all about it.

By contrast, a disciple of Our Lord – like Mary, hearing the words of the Angel Gabriel and immediately jumping up to carry that news to others – a disciple of Our Lord must be willing to engage with the Word of God that has been made known to him, and do something with the message he has heard! We have to dive headlong, as it were, into the depths of the Mysteries that have been revealed, and actively seek to be transfused by those Divine Mysteries, and – what is even more important – to be changed by them! In other words, we have to ask ourselves, ‘What practical difference do my sharing in these Mysteries make to my life?’ Hold that thought for next week!

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