

“Christ has entered into heaven... now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.”

Heb 9:24

The feast of the Ascension brings Eastertide to a close. The great drama of our redemption has been worked out in the life of Christ and in the Church's liturgy from the beginning of Advent until today. The Paschal candle, which stands as a quasi-sacramental presence of Christ amongst us – as the crucifix did on Good Friday – is extinguished as the personal presence of Our Lord is lost to us from sight.

The Incarnate Son of God, in one great sweeping movement, came down to earth, taught, healed, and forgave sins, suffered for us, died on the Cross, descended yet further into the bowels of hell, before rising again from the dead, and ascending back into heaven to be seated at the right hand of God the Father in glory. Along the way He, as it were, scooped up a fallen humanity to take with Him into the next life all those who choose to conform themselves to Him in this life. The great act of Atonement is accomplished.

Even so, the work is not completed. We who remain on earth are still in the process of conforming ourselves – by the power of God's grace – to a greater likeness to Christ, and in that process Our Lord comes continuously to our aid as He stands before the throne of the Father to plead our cause with cries and tears, offering up prayers and supplications on our behalf, as it says elsewhere in the Letter to the Hebrews (Heb 5:7).

Christ is the mediator – the go-between – who intercedes on our behalf, and offers up to the Father all our needs, including our penitence and sorrow, and at the same time He is the Person through whom the Father's mercy and forgiveness, His charity and blessings and graces, are poured down upon us and into our hearts and our minds. This is the work that Our Lord attends to every day, now that He is ascended back into heaven. He never

ceases to plead for us: there is no moment when His voice falls silent, when He takes a rest from working out our salvation before the face of the Father who sent Him into the world for this very purpose: ‘Go and rescue them from sin and the consequences of their sins, my Son, and bring them back to me, to their homeland, where they were always intended from the moment of their creation to end up.’

Now that He is lifted up – on the Cross on Calvary, and into the highest heights of heaven in His ascension – Our Lord begins to draw all things to Himself, as He promised He would, and to present them to His Father (Jn 12:32). For Christ knows what we are only dimly aware of, namely that we are caught in the net of a damaged nature and even when we have repented and confessed our sins, still we can do little more than thrash around in the muddy waters of this life, relying completely, as we must, on the grace of God if we are to be raised up at the last to share with Him the glory that He died to win for us.

In other words, although the act of Atonement is accomplished, the work of our sanctification and salvation goes on. And to this end, the one thing that Our Lord pleads for from His Father at this stage is the sending down upon His Church, and into our souls, the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Giver of supernatural life, the Sanctifier. It is the Holy Spirit who will be sent down to continue in the life of the Church generally, and in our hearts individually, the work that the Second Person of the Trinity began when He was still personally present upon earth. ‘And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.’

That is our task between today and the feast of Pentecost in ten days’ time: to prepare to be clothed once more with the power from on high as the Father pours out again, as He does every year, the fire of His love in the form of the Holy Spirit. Pray. Pray each day until Pentecost the *Prayer to the Holy Spirit*, ‘Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful,

and enkindle in them the fire of your love.’ Make a novena of this prayer, and join Our Lady and the Apostles who prayed the first ever novena in the Church’s history.

Send forth thy spirit, and they shall be created.

And thou shalt renew the face of the earth.