

“God has gone up with shouts of joy. The Lord goes up with trumpet blast.”

Ps 46:6

The feast of the Ascension can sometimes feel a bit abstract. We seem to be celebrating the absence of Our Lord, and it is difficult to get excited, perhaps, about an event which has nothing to show for it except a disappearance. At Christmas we can see a baby in a manger, shepherds, kings, and angels. At Easter we see a resurrected body displaying five wounds. At Pentecost we see tongues of fire, and hear the wind blowing through the Upper Room. But on the Ascension there is nothing to see except someone waving farewell.

And yet the Ascension ranks alongside these three feasts as one of the most glorious events in the life of Christ and in the story of our redemption, as it says in the Creed, ‘For us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven... For our sake He was crucified... and rose again... He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.’ And this is all for our sake and for the sake of our salvation.

Far from being an abstract event, or a mere epilogue to the main story, this – the Ascension – is what our religion is all about. In what way? It is at the moment of the Ascension that, returning to His rightful place above, our Saviour opens for us the gates of heaven so that where He has gone we might follow. We might say that about several events in the Christian calendar of course: the Incarnation at Christmas, the death of Christ on Good Friday, the resurrection on Easter Sunday, and now the Ascension. But that’s because all of these individual happenings are, in the sight of God, one single sweeping action whereby the Son of God comes down to earth, dies for us, descends into hell on Holy Saturday, rises again, and ascends back to His heavenly throne. Remember, God lives in an eternal present where there is no past and no future, so all of these events make up one single movement. As

a result, the Ascension is the glorious finale in the work of our redemption, and today's psalm cries in triumph, 'God has gone up with shouts of joy. The Lord goes up with trumpet blast.' One can almost hear the jubilant fanfare and the roar of the choirs of angels as their God rejoins them in heaven! The Triumphs in the days of the Roman Empire, when victorious generals paraded through the city's streets to the acclamation of the crowds, were as nothing compared to the jubilation of heaven that greets the Son of God as He ascends once more to His proper place at the right hand of the Father on this day.

But today's feast is even more than a triumphal victory parade over death. When Christ ascends to His heavenly throne He is taking His place as King, both of heaven and of earth, as it says not once but twice in today's Psalm: 'For God is King of all the earth' (vv.3,8). God created the heavens and the earth, and is sovereign ruler of both. Christ, and Christ alone, is possessed of this Universal Kingship. It is only Christ who has the right to rule our world, our nations, our societies, our families, and our individual lives. It is our duty, as God's creatures, to enthrone Christ as King and Ruler of our hearts, our households, and our society. It is our responsibility as Catholics not only to invite Christ into our lives but to surrender our lives to Him and to allow His will to rule our hearts, our minds, and our wills.

Nor does this apply only to our spiritual lives. We should live all aspects of our lives in the shadow of the Cross because it is only by being conformed to Christ crucified that we can have peace in our hearts. That is what living a life of Christian virtue means, being conformed to Christ crucified. And more than that, we should be pro-actively engaged in our society to help bring about the reign of Our Lord Jesus Christ in civil matters also. Our laws and statutes should be framed according to God's law, not according to our fancy or to the prevailing ideology.

It is this social kingship of Christ – as well as His spiritual reign over our hearts and our minds – that is put in place at the moment of Our Lord's Ascension. When Our Lord

takes up His place on His heavenly throne once more, everything is set for the return to a proper harmony between Creator and creatures that was always intended by God from the outset but which was disrupted by sin.

Today's feast, then, is intimately linked with the feast of Christ the King which we keep towards the end of the Church's year. As such, it has practical implications for our living out the life of our Catholic Faith, and is no mere abstract celebration.

Just as St Pancras points us to the things that are in heaven so we do well to let our gaze turn upwards on today's feast, and keep our eyes fixed firmly on the things that are above, on God and the things of God.