

The Ascension¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Friday, May 18, 1860

My Sisters, yesterday was the feast of the Ascension. This feast continues for ten days, until Pentecost. Ascension is the end, the last feast of our Lord on earth; **it is the triumph, the harvest. Our Lord** Jesus Christ certainly deserved this triumph, since his poor body suffered much to enjoy glorification and to be seated at the right hand of the heavenly Father. He had suffered such bodily humiliation, *he was crushed as under a press* (cf. Is 53:5), as the prophet Isaiah says, *his appearance like that of a leper* (cf. Is 52:14).

Our Lord knew ahead of time all that he would suffer. When one knows in advance that one must suffer, it is worse. We must rejoice over this triumph, since our Lord fully merited it. His soul had suffered so much, with all the sorrows of the Garden of Olives (cf. Mt 26:37-38). He always suffered as he viewed the sins of the world. We should indeed rejoice that this blessed soul will enjoy its glory in heaven. Jesus Christ will be seated at the right hand of his Father (cf. Mk 16:19). As he rises we should say: ***Worthy are you, O Lord, to receive power, glory and honor forever and ever, because you purchased us with your blood*** (cf. Rev 5:9, 12), as the saints sing in the book of Revelation.

We should be happy to see the day of reward for our Lord finally arrive. In a sense, love is the loser. Of course, he will return, but not in the same way. He told his downhearted disciples, ***It is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate (Holy Spirit) will not come to you*** (Jn 16:7). The sight of our Lord's body was an obstacle for the apostles who were too attached to it. Our Lord consoled them by saying: It is for your good, *it is better for you that I go*. As the time drew near, they became sad; they had not learned to appreciate their Good Master. It was like losing a father, a mother. After the Ascension, they were no longer sad. They had learned and understood things better. They could visit the Garden of Olives without sadness. They understood that the glory of their master had required this sacrifice.

What a beautiful day for heaven, as well as for the earth! Here is what is recorded. The Mount of Olives is near Jerusalem. One must first go down from the city, since Jerusalem is built on several hills and surrounded by valleys. The Mount of Olives is not far. One passes through a valley where there is a flooding stream, the torrent of Cedron, with the Cenacle not far away, on a hillside on Mt. Zion. Our Lord gathered his disciples in the Cenacle for the last time. Before leaving them, the evangelists say that he repeated once again the discourse of the Last Supper, with all its goodness and tenderness. He insisted on concord, charity, love of God, and union with him. Even at other times, he had kept telling them: ***Remain in my love. If the branches are not united to the vine, they cannot have life nor bear fruit. Whoever remains in me will bear much fruit. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you*** (cf. Jn 15:4-5, 7).

After our Lord had repeated this discourse, with about one hundred twenty disciples who were there, they processed to the Garden of Olives very quietly, passing through the places where our Lord had suffered so much. The apostles could see our Lord, but the rest of Jerusalem could not. It was the first Catholic procession, with the hearts of the apostles set afire, together with the Blessed Virgin, whose immaculate heart was so perfect. They sang hymns and canticles.

When they arrived – the Mount of Olives is not far from Jerusalem, a mere hill – our Lord gave them his last instructions: ***Return to the city; I will send you the Holy Spirit.*** The apostles asked a very indiscreet

¹ Number 217. *L'Ascension*.

question; how crude they were! ***Are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?*** What poor men! They thought that our Lord had to become a great king, and they would be his ministers. With kindness, our Lord told them: ***It is not for you to know the time when my Father will do this; go now, teach all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and behold I am with you until the end of time. But go first to prepare yourselves; return to the city, until you receive the Holy Spirit that I will send you*** (cf. Acts 1:4-8).

Everyone knelt down while our Lord blessed them with the sign of the cross, model of the blessing given by priests. After receiving this very rich and powerful blessing, the apostles saw him rise in their midst. As he was rising, our Lord's radiance was no longer mitigated. He was radiant like the sun, and his clothes shining, white as snow. They saw the spectacle that would be repeated at the end of the world. Jesus rose with all his glory and majesty. You can picture this clearly; the apostles following our Lord with their heart and soul would have liked to go to heaven with him; they remained there for a long time contemplating this sun of grace and love; in particular the Blessed Virgin, who was more perfect, with a more loving heart, and St. Magdalene with a more ardent love than the others.

The apostles remained there, contemplating our Lord. In his goodness, he had wanted them to witness his ascension. While he could have risen quickly above a starry sky, he wanted to go slowly, gradually, to give them the joy of contemplating him. When Jesus Christ disappeared from view, a beautiful cloud, like a robe tinged with golden sunlight, blocked their view of Jesus who disappeared in a stream of light. No one thought of leaving. Jesus was gone, but they remained. Two angels appeared and said to them: ***Men of Galilee, why are you standing there? This Jesus of Nazareth, who has been taken up into heaven with such glory and majesty, will return at the end of the world; as for you, go and wait in prayer for the Holy Spirit who will come soon*** (cf. Acts 1:11).

Then the apostles opened their eyes. Entranced, they had witnessed a great triumph. With Mary they came down the mountain. Jesus, their father, was no longer with them; but the Blessed Virgin was their mother. **They returned to the Cenacle, where she became mother and queen.** Under the guidance of the Blessed Virgin, they made a very good retreat. Mary reminded them of gospel scenes, especially the hidden life of our Lord that she alone had witnessed. She spoke of the incarnation and Nazareth. They knew nothing of this. Jesus was conceived and will return to earth in his sacramental birth. He will be conceived, so to speak, in priests who will give him birth once the Holy Spirit comes. Jesus will come from the heart of priests and remain here until the end of the world.

What was happening when our Lord rose to heaven? Did he rise alone? The apostles did not see him. Only the Blessed Virgin saw him, accompanied by all the saints of earth who formed his escort and followed him everywhere. Among them were Adam and Eve, our first parents, the just man Abel, and Melchisedech; in a special way, a small group had the sole privilege of singing a beautiful canticle of love, the one hundred and forty-four thousand little ones, who in their innocence formed his angelic and human court. The saints who had sanctified themselves for four thousand years were all there, some body and soul. Good St. Joseph, his father, was outstanding in brilliance, along with St. John the Baptist who also had special brilliance. Present also were St. Joachim and St. Ann, the grandfather and grandmother of our Lord, and some kings of Judah.

What a beautiful array accompanied our Lord during his rapid flight! Each saint was singing a special song. The most beautiful was that of David, who had sung it with such glory (cf. Ps 23). Moses was also repeating his triumphal song (cf. Ex 15:1-18), along with the patriarchs and Adam and Eve who sang: **O happy fault that merited for us such a redeemer!** There were two rows: the larger one, composed only of souls, was singing like the angels, and the other was singing in harmony. Jesus entered heaven body and soul. The souls had every reason to celebrate his triumph.

Until now, the holy city of heaven had been the enclosed garden, the sealed fountain referred to in Scripture (cf. Song 4:12), and no saint had been able to enter. Jesus Christ knocked on the door and the angels inquired, *Who is it?*, as David records (in the Psalms). Our Lord answered: ***Open the door, it is the King of glory. Who is this King of glory? It is the Lord of hosts (virtues) who comes from the earth, adorned with his triumph,*** and he repeats: *Open the eternal gates.* The angels ask a second time: *Who is this King of glory? Dominus virtutum, Rex gloriae (The Lord of hosts, the King of glory).* All the souls repeat the refrain with him: *It is the King of glory, it is the Lord of hosts* (cf. Ps 23:7-10). The doors are opened, and will remain open until the last of the elect will have entered. Then they will be closed (cf. Mt 25:10) for all eternity.

Jesus Christ entered first, followed by all the saints. He passed by the nine choirs of angels who accompany him with acclamations and praises. There was never anything like this triumphal entry into heaven. Jesus Christ came before his Father, prostrated himself at his feet, not as God but as man, and offered his worship and his wounds, repeating the prayer made in the Cenacle: ***I have accomplished the work that you gave me to do; now I come before you; glorify me, Father, with you, with the glory that I had with you before the world began*** (cf. Jn 17:4-5). He showed him his wounds, his claim to glory, and presented him the immense crowd of saints, the first fruits of his victory over hell. The heavenly Father welcomed him, declared him king of heaven and earth. At his name, every knee shall bend of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth (cf. Phil 2:10). What a wonderful day! Jesus Christ placed all the saints on thrones. He designated one to each of the elect adorned with the crown of his own work. This throne could have been one that was left empty by the fallen angels, Cherubim or Seraphim, now to be occupied by humans. Each takes one according to the greatness of his love. My Sisters, the throne of a Cherubim or Seraphim must be reserved for you. Try to beautify this throne so that you may be worthy of it, and that Jesus Christ will not have been mistaken in calling you.



Point for reflection:

In this very imaginative meditation, St. Peter Julian contemplates a page of the Gospel, enriched with various texts from Sacred Scripture. He pictures the glory of Christ, the joy of heaven, and the mission of the disciples whom he leaves behind on earth. Where do you find yourself in this scene?