

The Festival of the Ascension of our Lord
St. Mark 16:14-20
May 25th, 2017
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Greenville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Go into All the World

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Lord + Jesus has ascended into Heaven, and now sits on the right hand of God the Father to judge both the quick and the dead, and of His reign and kingdom there shall be no end. This sitting on the right hand of the Father should not be understood as if there would be three chairs with the Father on Christ's left, and the Holy Ghost in another chair with them. This would be dividing the Godhead. This is why in pictures of our Lord's triumphal reign there is only one Man pictured and the other persons of the Godhead are figured symbolically. Rather, our Lord's sitting at the right hand of the Father should be understood spiritually. No offense to any left-handed people, but the right hand symbolizes power and authority, for it is the right hand of man which most often possesses the most strength.

Indeed, your right arm is an image of the Holy Trinity; of three Persons in One God, and One God in three Persons, for you have one limb, but three parts: arm, hand and fingers. The hand has to do what the arm wills it to do; and the fingers have to do what the hand wills it to do. Therefore, the Father sent out the Son, our Lord + Jesus, to be His right hand. He obeyed His Father's will, by obeying and fulfilling the Commandments of the Lord perfectly and completely, and by His suffering and death in our place upon the tree of the holy Cross. He then ascended into Heaven to take His place of authority; His place where He rules over the whole catholic and Christian Church in Heaven and on Earth. From His throne at the Father's right hand, He and the Father send out the Holy Ghost—His Finger—to guide, comfort and protect the holy Christian Church on Earth.

Our Lord, when He ascended into Heaven, did not leave us alone to fend for ourselves against the devil, the world and our sinful flesh. He did not abandon us. Rather, He sent His Comforter; His Holy Ghost to comfort and protect His holy Bride, the Church. This begs the questions, "What does our Lord's ascension mean? What exactly do we celebrate today?" We celebrate two things: First, that our Lord no longer appeared to His Apostles, nor does He appear to us, in His human form. But He still comes to us in His Body and Blood given in bread and wine in the Sacrament of the Altar. When we come to this Altar and receive our Lord's Body and Blood given in bread and wine, and thereby receive the gifts of forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation, we are meeting once again our Lord and Savior, Who fulfilled the Law perfectly for us, suffered and died for us, and ascended into Heaven to sit on the right hand of the Father, in order to send to us His Holy Ghost, so that He might create and sustain faith and life within us.

This brings us to the second reason to celebrate our Lord's ascension: For, the Arm and Hand of God, send forth His Finger—the Holy Ghost—to redeem us from evil and make us, and the whole Church, holy in His sight. If the Son had not ascended, then the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, could not come, just as our Lord preached to His Apostles, and as we have heard in the Gospel readings for the last few Sundays. And just as the Son obeyed the Father's will, the Holy Ghost obeys the will of the Father and the Son and enlarges the Church on Earth. It is by the Holy Ghost that the Apostles first preached the Gospel *"to every creature"* in *"all the world."* ("Creature" is just another term for those whom God created, that is, mankind). It is by the Holy Ghost that all of us in the Church have been called, gathered, enlightened, sanctified, and kept (or preserved) in the one, true faith by the holy means of grace.

We meet our Lord in His Person whenever we receive the means of grace, and when we meet Him He gives us His Holy Ghost to sustain and keep us in the one, true faith. When we hear the preaching of the Gospel; at our Holy Baptism, and subsequently whenever we remember and live according to our Holy Baptism; when we confess our sins to our Pastor, and thereby receive the absolution from our Pastor, as if from our very Lord Himself; when we gather around this Altar as the One Body of Christ, to receive the Body of Christ in bread and wine; and whenever we gather together as a group of believers in our Lord's Name, (even if that group is only two or three persons) the Holy Ghost is working to call us by the Gospel, to gather us together into one flock, to enlighten us with the Holy Word of God, to make us holy and sinless, as He is holy and sinless, and to keep (and preserve) us in the one, true faith until our Lord + Jesus returns again on the Last Day.

The Evangelist St. Mark relates to us our Lord's final commission to His Apostles before His ascension. They were to *"go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."* Our Lord even tells His Apostles what they were to expect when the Holy Ghost came upon them. In our Lord's Name *"they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."* These are the gifts that our Lord + Jesus gives to His Apostles and to His holy Church by His authority that He claims by taking His seat on the right hand of the Father.

These works were necessary at the beginning, because just as a newly planted tree needs plenty of water when it is young, so did the holy Church need, as the Evangelist St. Mark puts it, the *"confirmation of the Word by the accompanying signs."* But, when the tree is older and has a firm root in the ground, then we do not need to water the tree for the Lord will provide the things necessary for it to sustain life. The holy Christian Church, having taken firm root in the world, no longer needs such signs to accompany the Word. Rather, we have the signs that our Lord has given us to confirm the Word, and that is the means of grace: the Blessed Sacraments and the holy Gospel. By these signs is the Word confirmed and established in our midst today.

Now, there are some who would argue that if those signs listed in St. Mark's Gospel are not being done today, then the Holy Ghost is not present; neither in the Church, nor in the believer. This is why there are whole Church bodies that make a big deal about whether or not somebody can speak in tongues. According to them, if a person cannot speak in tongues, then he is not a true Christian, and doesn't have enough faith, so therefore he's got to do more good works, or be a better person, so that he can be a "real" Christian and speak in tongues.

To this I would respond that the Church does now spiritually what the Apostles and the Early Church did physically. Let us consider speaking in tongues. First of all, speaking in tongues is not the babbling, incoherent, nonsense that most proponents of speaking in tongues use and encourage. This goes against God's nature as being orderly and decent. Rather, speaking in tongues is the ability to speak in a language that one does not know, so that those who do know the language may reap the benefit of the speech. This is why our Lord says, *"speaking with new tongues"* for they possessed the

ability to speak with a tongue, but they would speak with a *new* tongue. We speak in a new tongue whenever we speak God's holy Word, for it is a language foreign to our sinful nature and to the world. Just as when we pray, the Holy Ghost takes our prayers and puts it into a language that our Heavenly Father can understand, so too, when we sing the praises of our Lord and speak His holy Word we are speaking in a tongue that is foreign to this world.

The same is true of "*taking up serpents*" and "*drinking anything deadly*." For when we call someone to repent and turn from their sin, and turn to Christ, and they do so, we are removing the serpent—the temptations of the devil—from them. And when we hear false doctrine, and reject it, and cling to the pure teachings of holy Scripture as we have received them from the holy Apostles, it is the same as drinking a deadly thing and not being affected by it. For false doctrine is a very deadly drink, and to not only drink from the cup of false doctrine, but to relish in it is a drink that leads to eternal death. Which is why we shouldn't go around listening haphazardly to false doctrine, but should cling to the pure preaching of our pastors, and cling to a parish and church body that does not tolerate false doctrine to be taught within it.

The laying on of hands of the sick to heal the infirm is also present today. Even though there are some who claim to be able to heal people physically, the holy Church now heals people spiritually. Ministers lay hands on people when giving the Absolution privately as a sign of the reception of the Holy Ghost, so that when we have hands placed upon us it is sign of the spiritual healing—the forgiveness of sins—that is being bestowed upon us by the Holy Ghost.

All of this shows us how our Lord + Jesus Christ reigns from the right hand of God. It shows us how the Arm, the Hand, and the Finger all work together to call sinners to repentance, and to create and sustain us Christians in the one, true faith. Our Lord has arisen, and He was received up into Heaven, but He has not left us alone, but gives us His Holy Ghost, so that we may have our ears opened up to hear His holy Word, and be strengthened and renewed in the true faith, so that we may rejoice that our sins have been forgiven, and enjoy eternal life and salvation. May the Lord grant this unto us all until He comes again on the Last Day to receive us up into Heaven just as He was. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.