

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson - recording at Mass expands these
27th May 2022 – The Ascension

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Last Sunday we heard in our 2nd reading from Apocalypse St John's account of his vision of the new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, and of the absence of any Temple in that heavenly city.

Today we hear of the going up into heaven of that Temple who is the living place of communion with God. For the Temple in Jerusalem was the place where God had promised to meet His people, there to dwell in their midst, and there to answer their prayers.

Now that Temple has been superseded. In the reading of the Passion we hear how, after our Lord's death, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. It was not simply an act of destruction, but the removing of an obstacle, of something that impeded communication from one side of the veil to the other. The death of Christ was the moment when that impenetrable veil between God and humanity had at last been breached for good. This is what the 2nd reading today from Hebrews has to tell us.

For when Christ died, he was the Temple. Remember his accusers said how could he rebuild it in three days, He was speaking of his own body, the Temple. Jesus was also the sacrifice, and he was the priest. By his death he had torn apart sin. All that remained was for Christ the priest, having torn open the veil in the Temple, to enter in himself; that is to enter the presence of the Father.

It is this which Christ does in his Ascension. For often we see it only as the Apostles saw it in the 1st reading in Acts. They saw the Lord depart towards the heavens, but they did not of course, see him arrive there.

That is what the 2nd reading is describing for us, for in the Ascension, Christ, who is the Temple, the Lamb of Sacrifice and the Priest, himself goes up to heaven to complete what he had already begun on the cross. As man he had already opened the veil, and now he went through to the other side, ascending as man into the presence of his Father.

This he does as our priest, our representative with the Father. As Hebrews puts it; *'through the blood of Jesus we have the right to enter the sanctuary by a new way which he had opened for us, a living opening through the curtain, that is to say, his body.'*

Now the meaning of the Scripture about Christ's death is becoming clearer. When the veil of the Temple was torn from top to bottom, this was the veil that is Christ's sacred body, his flesh and blood. This being torn apart for us in death became the way through for us to go to heaven.

Christ's Ascension into heaven is the entry of redeemed humanity into heaven. Christ's entry makes possible our own future entry into heaven. The City of God, the living Temple, came down out of heaven at the incarnation, at the moment when Mary conceived him in her womb and he became man. Now all that the incarnation of God as Man in Mary's womb promised is at last fulfilled in him as he ascends into heaven.

He has already died and risen from the dead, now in his ascension, he who is the living Temple of God, raised to new and indestructible life, is our trailblazer into glory. He goes to prepare a place for us.

By *'preparing a place,'* he means that by taking our human flesh into heaven, into the living presence of God, he thereby makes a place ready for us.

So Hebrews says that *'Christ has made his appearance once and for all, now at the end of the last age, to do away with sin by sacrificing himself.'*

Now we only await his appearance to bring all things to their conclusion, which Hebrews says: *When he, Christ appears a second time it will not be to deal with sin but to reward with salvation those who are waiting for him.*

That is why in every Mass we pray *'we await the blessed hope and the coming of our saviour Jesus Christ.'* He does not merely bring us hope, **he is our hope in person.**

Reminder of 4 Advent candles, only **hope** remained alight, but from it others were able to be lit.

So we pray in the Collect for today: *For the Ascension of Christ your Son is our exaltation, and where he the Head has gone before in glory, the Body is called to follow in hope.*

Even so. Come Lord Jesus. Amen.

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