

could pretend derives from any doctrine formed in the bosom of catholicism.

Our purpose has been to show that the Church today, in coming to the defence of liberty, is not simply adopting an attitude forced on her by historical necessity, nor compromising with principles different from her own, but is quite clearly re-asserting in a new historical context the dignity of the human person in conjunction with the primacy of truth, a joint principle which has ever been the constant standard of her teaching and her activity.



IN MIND OF HEAVENLY THINGS

An Ascensiontide Meditation by PAX

EACH year I am dazzled anew by what Paul Claudel calls 'the atmosphere of glory' that is the Ascension. Perhaps I am prejudiced, as the Ascension once marked the end of a long trial of ill-health when I was allowed to make my solemn vows and final monastic profession.

It was the odder as in the past I had so often been ill on that day. So much so that I wondered if lying on one's back were not, after all, the best way of looking up at the sky and, paradoxically enough, of following our ascending Lord to glory.

A very ancient ascensiontide hymn remarks that it was
 'after being spat upon, after being scourged,
 after the cross, that he rose to the Father's throne'.

The beginning of the Ascension is the way of the cross. We climb Calvary and mount the cross before we ascend to the Father. But the best way of ascending is to be in him, who is the way, who said, 'No man cometh unto the Father, but by me'. The way must also be in us.

As St Augustine remarks (in Treatise 24 on John): 'By many it is understood that the Son was glorified by the Father in that he spared him not, but delivered him up for us all'. But if that were all, there would be none of that admirable 'atmosphere of glory' that is the chief note of the Ascension. So St Augustine continues: 'But if he can be said to be glorified by his passion,

how much more so by his resurrection (and *a fortiori* by his ascension)? For in his passion, his humility rather than his glory is set forth . . . but God hath also exalted him, giving him a name which is above all names, that in the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of the Father . . .

As the hymn at matins points out, the Ascension is very much mankind's feast. It is we who ascend with our head.

'With trembling there, the angels see
The changed estate of man,
The flesh which sinned
By flesh redeemed,
Man in the godhead reign!

All the ascensiontide liturgy is the long contemplation by the Church of the scene described in Acts, i, 1-14: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" But he said "It is not for you to know the times nor the moments, which the Father has put in his own power, but you will receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you, and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem and in Judea and in Samaria and even to the uttermost parts of the earth". And when he had said these things, while they looked on he was raised up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. . . . 'Then', continues St Luke, 'they returned to Jerusalem from the mount.'

How fruitful of meditation that last sentence for a contemplative! At the Ascension, in very truth, 'they returned to Jerusalem', 'that Jerusalem that is above', the heavenly Jerusalem, 'from the mount'. They returned in him, with him to the Father, no less than they went back to the earthly Jerusalem to await the Father's promise.

'I am nothing, I have nothing and I desire nothing', cried the English mystic, Walter Hilton, 'but Jesus, and to be with him in peace in Jerusalem.'

'And when they were come in'; we have to 'come in' to what one of the Church Fathers calls 'the inner court of the mind', before we can 'go up' to the Father with Jesus.

'They were all with one mind persevering in prayer with the women and Mary, the Mother of Jesus'; surely that is full of meaning these days when our hearts are full of the Holy Father's plans for the Ecumenical Council and his great desire for the

realization of our Lord's own prayer '*ut unum sint*'! Another phrase that should nourish our prayer is 'where abode Peter . . .'. It is always wise to be where Peter is when seeking one-ness and the Father's face with Jesus.

'Be not sorrowful', says Jesus. 'It is time that I should return to him that sent me. I pray to the Father that he may keep you, Alleluia' (response at matins).

'When Christ ascended on high', runs another response, 'he led captivity captive. He gave gifts to men'; and what gifts! Eternal life, the Father's face, partaking in the godhead! We should scarcely dare to say these things had not holy Church said them first in the very mass! 'The Son of God', Irenaeus dares to say, 'became man, that man might become the Son of God', and another, even more daringly, says: 'God became man that man might become God.' But they merely echo Jesus himself who quoted the psalm, 'I said, ye are gods'.

As St Leo magnificently says (Sermon 2 on the Ascension): 'Even in the form of a servant, many signs of his divinity flashed forth, but when the bonds of death had been broken after the passion, weakness became strength, mortality immortality, contumely glory. Our joy is that our nature in Christ is advanced above all the heavenly hosts, all the ranks of angels, far beyond the heights of all the powers, to sit with God the Father.'

'Faith', he says again, 'is increased by the Lord's ascension and the coming of the Holy Ghost, so that neither bonds nor prison, nor banishment, nor hunger, nor fire, nor the teeth of wild beasts nor any torments devised by cruelty has affrighted it. This faith has cast out devils and raised the dead to life.' And best of all, perhaps: 'The advantage of the ascension is that everything that before was a cause of fear has become a cause of joy'. So the Ascension is the feast of perfect love that casts out fear.

The reason for this is that 'they had lifted up the inward gaze of their souls' (a contemplative I know often talks of one's 'other eyes') 'to the divinity of him sitting at the right hand of God, the Father'. How splendidly audacious what follows: 'They were no longer hindered by the interposition of bodily vision from directing their mind to that which, descending, had never been absent from the Father, nor, in ascending, withdrawn from themselves'. Truly 'in an ineffable manner he began to be more present as to his divinity, when he became farther off as to his humanity . . .

if our minds be there', he promises, 'we shall be in peace here'.

'To see God', says St Augustine, 'thou must be made clean . . . "blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God".' (Sermon 2.) Again, in Sermon 3 he says, 'Let everyone that is faithful, having received so much, learn to hope, and hold the goodness of God in the past and present as a pledge for what is yet to come'.

Perhaps one of the loveliest passages ever penned on the Ascension is St Gregory's Homily 29: 'Behold he comes, leaping and skipping upon the hills. In coming to redeem us, he did indeed, as it were, make leaps—from heaven to the womb, from the womb to the manger, from the manger to the cross, from the cross to the sepulchre, from the sepulchre back to heaven; to incite us to follow him, the Truth made leaps for our sake, he rejoiced as a giant to run his way, that from our hearts we may say to him, "Draw us, and we will run after thee, in the odour of thy ointments"'. It behoves us to follow him thither in our hearts, where we believe him to have ascended in body. Let nothing below delight us . . . since we have a Father in heaven.'

On this day, says the liturgy, he set our frailty on the right hand of God! Small wonder that our Lord in one of the responses of matins tells us: 'Let not your heart be troubled: I go to the Father . . . and I will send you, Alleluia, the Spirit of truth, and your heart shall rejoice, Alleluia!'

And after such a promise, how could we not, as holy Church prays, 'live in mind of heavenly things'?



THE PASSION OF THE HOLY MARTYRS PERPETUA AND FELICITY: I

(Translated by H. O'D.)

SS Perpetua and Felicity and their companions were martyred about A.D. 202, probably at Carthage. Their Acta include a kind of diary kept by Perpetua, and an account of a vision by Saturus, also one of the group, both written in a very direct and unliterary way, in considerable contrast with the rather fulsome style of the narrator, usually thought to be Tertullian.

HISTORIC examples of steadfast faith are collected and put in writing, because they bear witness to the power of God's grace, and help to inspire men; when read they come before us again, as it were, so that God shall be honoured