



Ascension Day 2015

Since Easter Sunday we have been celebrating the Resurrection of Jesus our Lord, reading the wonderful Gospel narratives, singing those glorious Easter hymns and meditating on the tremendous mysteries of our faith. So many images of our Risen Lord come to mind when we think of the Resurrection: the empty Tomb, the women and the angels, Mary Magdalene, who took him for the gardener, Cleopas and his companion, who failed to recognise Jesus on the road to Emmaus until he entered into their home and broke bread for them, the disciples in the upper room and the meeting with Thomas a week later (Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe), the encounter on the shores of the Lake Galilee (Do you love me more than these?) and, then, reading the rest of the Gospel in the light of the Resurrection and beginning to see what it all means. What a forty days it has been!

The final event is that recounted in today's Gospel from St Mark. "Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation.' So the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven: there at the right hand of God he took his place, while, they, going out, preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that accompanied it." Today we celebrate Jesus being taken up into heaven, his Ascension, but what is it he takes up into heaven? He takes with him his body, born of Mary his Mother, a body just like ours. However, his body was scourged and crowned with thorns, crucified, died and was buried and lay three days in the sepulchre; his body rose victoriously on the third day and appeared to the disciples, showing them his hands and his side, a body whose wounds were still open when he invited Thomas to put his finger into the holes in his hands and his hand into the wound in his side. The body that Jesus takes up into heaven is risen, glorified and transformed into a new reality and yet the wounds of his Passion and Death, by which he redeemed us and reconciled us with the Father, are still open and will remain so until the last soul is saved, such is the depth of his mercy and love.

Pope Francis often has interesting insights into Scripture and the Christian faith. He said on Ascension Day last year that, "When Jesus returns to the Father, he shows him his wounds and says to him, 'Look, Father, this is the price of the forgiveness that you give.' When the Father looks at his Son's wounds, he always forgives us, not because we are good but because Jesus paid the price for us. Looking at Jesus' wounds, the Father becomes more merciful. This is the great work of Jesus in heaven today: showing the Father the price of forgiveness, his wounds. How wonderful this is because it moves us not to have fear of asking forgiveness. The Father always forgives because he looks at the wounds of Jesus, looks at our sin and forgives it."

Today's Gospel also reminds us that, just as Jesus sent out his apostles to preach the Good News and to share with the whole of creation the joy of God's loving mercy, so he is sending us out as missionaries today. There is nothing optional about the command of Jesus, "Go out to the whole world: proclaim the good news." We cannot call ourselves Christian if we keep the Good News to ourselves. If we truly live in the presence of the Lord and the power of his Spirit, then we too can be the

apostles Jesus wants us to be. That's what's so exciting about being a Christian, the fact that we take Jesus to others.

So we ask Him today to transform our lives through his Resurrection and Ascension and we thank him for the gift of forgiveness and for calling each one of us to be an apostle and so share in the mission of the Church. Will you take up the challenge?