

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford at a Vigil Mass  
on The Solemnity of the Ascension  
May 29, 2019

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The human life of the Son of God is divided between His Nativity and His return in Judgment at the end of time. The first part is *short*: thirty-three years by most estimations. The second part, which is the Heavenly Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ, already approaches 2000 years. The dividing line between these two parts of the Lord's life is *The Ascension*.

In the Gospels heard at Mass all yearlong we have the presentation of Our Lord's *earthly* ministry: His parables and other teachings and miracles, and above all there is the recounting of His Passion, Death, and Resurrection. But the Gospels close off before (or just give a hint of) the Ascension. Even the many devotional Lives of Christ mostly do the same thing: they stop short of the Ascension. Some even stop short of the Resurrection and end with the Lord's Death on the Cross! This is how Broadway and Hollywood most often treat the Lord even when their message is reverent or respectful and not blasphemous.

We cannot attach blame to any of that. The evangelists deliberately limited themselves to concentrate on the earthly life of Jesus. When writing *The Acts of the Apostles* Saint Luke admitted the fact. He described his gospel as the record of all that Jesus *began* to do. But it is also a matter of fact that for 2000 years it has been the *Ascended Christ* with Whom we have to do. The One we encounter in Word and Sacrament and prayer, and in the hearts of faithful people, is the Lord Who comes to us out of the whole length of His life in Heaven.

This means we must not be confused in our devotions and bottled up in our readings of the Gospels. Of course we love knowing about Jesus the carpenter from Nazareth. But ever since the Ascension Day Christians know the principles and powers at work in this carpenter are the operative forces which govern the universe. Some of you may remember the 1953 book "Your God is Too Small" by Anglican clergyman J.B. Phillips. The Gospel portrayals give us everything in the way of insight and food for devotion. But we do not want to remain stuck in the Gospel portrayal! Just before His Ascension, Our Lord declared, "All power in Heaven and on earth has been given to Me."

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The Ascended Christ still bears in His Sacred Body the marks of a crucifixion, and He also pleads for us in Heaven, and Whose offering of Himself once and for all on Calvary is made present for our sake and our salvation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. And so as one of the prayers for Ascension Day puts it: “We must seek Him in His glory.”

Our Lord tells us He has gone to prepare a place for us in Heaven. It is beside the point to be concerned with such earth-bound concerns as whether Heaven is *up* and where Jesus (and we) may be *going*. The great good news is that by His provision we are to *be with Jesus*, provided we love Him and follow Him as Lord. The writer of *The Epistle to the Hebrews* mustered every bit of self-restraint as he could when he declared, “We can claim a great high priest, and one who passed right up through the heavens. Jesus, the Son of God.” That has been good news for 2000 years.