

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Seventh Sunday of Easter
May 24, 2020

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The choice for a gospel at Mass today goes to a part of the Lord's great prayer of self-dedication during Holy Week. At the time this prayer was originally prayed, Our Lord Jesus was on the verge of returning to His pre-Incarnation state as Lord of Heaven and earth. His Passion and Cross would be the route to a full revealing of His glory on earth. The same passage works *both* in Holy Week and Eastertide. In Holy Week it has overtones of the Passion. But after the Resurrection the prayer seems more like the final report of an army field officer to his commander back at headquarters.

The fact this passage works both ways reminds us there is *unity* in the Passion, Death, Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost. It is all God's mighty work. In our liturgical year we separate this work over a period of weeks in order to absorb what we can of the mighty truths revealed. We do not question the time frame of the great forty days to Ascension, or the ten days to Pentecost. Those are a matter of Scriptural record. But the description of the Ascension is recorded by St Luke alone. Both Matthew and Mark are silent on the matter. And St John seems to place *both* the Ascension and Pentecost on Easter Day itself.

There is good reason then to think of the unity of Christ's life on earth as *a single work*. It was an invasion from the eternal world, or rather a taking up of what is transitory into the everlasting. Up to a point, the events of those thirty-three years can be described as ordinary earthly incidents. But the events which began the series of that earthly life, and the ones which brought an end to those physical appearances, were supernatural. This means our poor, earth-bound language is stretched to the maximum but still falls short of any complete description.

The events which bracketed Our Lord's earthly life were the Incarnation and the Ascension. They are links or bridges between Heaven and earth, and link the *time-less* world to the *time-series* world. The *time-series* world is describable. The *time-less* world is not describable except through symbols and analogy. The Creed does what it can in its short statements. "He came down from Heaven and was Incarnate." "He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the Right Hand of the Father." *Coming down* and *ascending* are language from our perspective and attempt to describe those transitions from eternity to chronological time and vice versa. That

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is how we try to understand God's mighty works in Christ. And of course in doing so we are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In our liturgical year we separate and single out the series of events and call them the Passion, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost. We do that so we may ponder them. But we also know they form a unity. No single event is separable from the others. There is no Resurrection without the Cross and the Resurrection is unthinkable without the Ascension. The withdrawal of Christ's physical body is also unthinkable to Christian experience without His promised return in the fresh outpouring of His Holy Spirit. It is all the mighty arm of God unbarred in a unique way in human history.

The Lord Risen, Ascended, Glorified, Sitting at the Right Hand of the Father, are literal, anthropocentric, terms. Guided by Divine inspiration we use them. But taken together they express the ultimate truth about Jesus of Nazareth. They declare the Gospel Good News that His Body is no longer lying in a tomb. These terms witness to Christ's eternal relationship to the Father, the significance of what He has done, and that you and I are permanently different because *He has done it all for us.*