

- With today's celebration of our Lord's ascension into Heaven, we come to the final piece of the mystery of our redemption, which we call the Paschal Mystery.
- Since Holy Thursday night, the Church has immersed Herself in Christ's Paschal Mystery, beginning with His suffering and death on the cross, and then His resurrection on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, and now – finally – our Lord's ascension into Heaven.
- Through these sacred mysteries, Jesus has redeemed us and made salvation possible. He has opened for us the way to Heaven.
- But the seeds of this mystery didn't begin on Holy Thursday. This mystery began with the Annunciation, when Christ left His heavenly throne, humbling Himself to become one of us in the virginal womb of His immaculate mother.
- After 9 months our blessed Lord was born into the cruel comforts of a stable, being laid in a rough-hewn manger. He had to flee into Egypt in His infancy to escape those seeking His life, and upon His return He passed most of His life quietly as a carpenter, a common laborer.
- At age 30 Jesus began His public ministry: healing the sick, raising the dead, multiplying loaves and fish to feed the hungry masses, exorcizing demons, teaching His followers the fullness of truth.
- And for all this, the Christ was requited with betrayal, mockery, scorn, and ridicule – beginning in the Garden of Gethsemane and ending in agonizing fashion on Calvary.
- Yet, He bore it all patiently and with a love that cannot be understood by sinful minds. Jesus did it all to save us from sin and from satan's power. He did it so that we might have access to our heavenly home.
- And with today's feast, our blessed Lord now shows us the way to Heaven! His work on earth completed, Jesus mounts His throne to shouts of joy as the Victor over sin and death.
- In a way, the Church's great proclamation on the Feast of Christ the King applies to today's feast as well: *Christus vincit! Christus regnat! Christus imperat!*
- Christ conquers, Christ reigns, Christ rules! His glorious ascension is our Lord's royal coronation as King of both heaven and earth.
- As I've meditated on this particular mystery of our Faith, I've always wondered if the apostles felt any trace of sadness at that moment.
- After our Lord's terrible suffering and death and their failure to stay with Him through His ordeal – excepting John the Beloved – one can only imagine the sorrow they felt.
- And yet the apostles' sorrow is turned to joy at our Lord's resurrection. The one Whom they love most, Whom they counted as dead, was restored to them, fulfilling their hopes and confirming the truth of Who they believed Him to be.
- But, after 40 days, our Lord leaves them again.
- Yet, there is absolutely no sense of sadness in the Church's liturgy for this feast: only joy! Indeed, our Gospel today says that after our Lord was taken up to Heaven, the apostles "did Him homage and then returned to Jerusalem with great joy!"
- Thus, today's liturgy is imbued with a sense of joyful longing to follow after our blessed Lord, to experience that glory that our Lord so wishes to share with us.
- So, we must make the Church's longing for Heaven our own. And we must rejoice in what has taken place through our Lord's ascension. Jesus is reigning supremely in Heaven, and our lowly human nature is divinized!

- We have a mighty King, in Whom we can have perfect confidence if we submit ourselves to Him, and our weak human nature is now elevated and participates in divine honors.
- By being loyal subjects to Christ our king and members of His body, we are given the hope of one day being divinized.
- We will hear this proclaimed in the Preface, which says that Christ *was taken up to heaven* in the sight of His disciples, *that He might make us sharers in His divinity*. Yet, this does not happen by accident. We must submit to the rule of our King.
- We submit to Christ's rule by raising our minds and hearts to the heavenly mysteries, understanding ever so acutely that sin keeps us bound to earth.
- We submit by repenting of whatever sins bind us, confessing them humbly, for sin is the great obstacle to our eternal glorification with Christ.
- In addition to frequenting Confession, we submit to our Lord's rule by making proper use of the other great means He has given us to overcome sin: the Eucharist.
- Yet Christ our King ascended into Heaven is not only a ruler, but also our great high priest, who offers Himself as victim for our sins so that we might be made holy.
- Thus, today's epistle from the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that we can "have confidence of entrance into the sanctuary by the new and living way Jesus opened for us through the veil, that is, His flesh."
- In other words, because Jesus died on the cross, allowing His flesh to be crucified and torn open, the veil separating Heaven and earth has been opened for us. By His sacrifice on Calvary, Christ our king and great high priest has given us access to Heaven.
- To follow where He has gone before us, we must go through His flesh, which is the Eucharist. Through our reception of Holy Communion, that which binds us to earth is loosed!
- Our venial sins are forgiven, we are given grace that strengthens and preserves us from mortal sin, and we are brought into closer communion and conformity with our Lord.
- Yet, we must approach the Eucharist "with a sincere heart and in absolute trust, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience." In other words, we must never receive Communion if we believe we may be in a state of mortal sin.
- But we must also have absolute trust, that is an absolute faith, that the Eucharist is really and truly the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ. This faith should be externalized by our prayerful recollection as we receive, and by our heartfelt prayers of gratitude afterwards.
- Without these two dispositions: being in a state of grace and having firm faith, our reception of the Eucharist will bear no fruit in our soul. And if we are in a state of mortal sin when we receive, then we commit sacrilege, and the state of our soul becomes even worse than before.
- Brothers and sister, our Lord desires that we, too, reign with Him gloriously in Heaven. Today, through the mystery of His Ascension, He shows us the way. That way is through the worthy and faithful reception of Holy Communion.
- May we always be ever so conscious of the great gift that we have in the Eucharist, and see in It the way that leads to eternal life.