

Ascension 2026

+ What do you hope for...for yourself...you children...that the kids don't bicker the entire road trip when going on this summer's vacation...what is it that you hope for? I think we tend to hope for too little *and* too much. We often hope too much when it comes to things of this world and we hope too little in terms of the next. We're celebrating the Ascension of our Lord into Heaven today and it's a celebration of hope. Listen to the words I prayed in today's opening prayer: "make us rejoice with devout thanksgiving, for the Ascension of Christ your Son is our exaltation, and where the Head has gone before in glory, the Body is called to follow in hope."

Back in December we recognized the virtue of hope in Advent. But that hope is one of waiting...hopeful waiting for the birth of Christ. Today's hope has us strive for something, a hope that has us move forward towards our destiny. And because Christ is already in Heaven, but we're not, we have what theologians call the 'already but not yet.'

With the Ascension of our Lord we believe that He is seated at the right hand of the Father. In ancient times being seated was a sign of authority, which is why it's always an option for the bishop to deliver his homilies sitting down and why back in the day, the bishop would sit and the people stand during the homily...maybe that's why a bishop always seems comfortable giving long homilies...that's a joke, don't tell Bishop Kemme I said that.

But Jesus says, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me." All power...that's authority alright; and why we believe Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. And keep in mind our Lord is in Heaven...in the flesh. He didn't shed his humanity when he returned to the Father. Christ remains fully human, physically, bodily, He dwells in Heaven. This is why and how our human nature has been exalted...humanity has already gone to Heaven in the person of Jesus.

The angels worship the Lord, both his divinity and his humanity...that reveals the triumph of our humanity. The world abuses human nature, our humanity is drug through the sewer...but Christ, He liberates it. And so, because of our real union with Christ...we are with Him in Heaven. Our presence in Heaven is spiritual and mystical, while physically we remain here on earth. That's why we feel a tension by living in-between Christ's first coming and His glorious return. That's the 'already, but not yet.' In one sense what we hope for is already in place, in Heaven, but clearly we're not yet fully there.

In our striving for the not yet part of it, we stumble and continue to struggle with sin; we encounter various challenges. But despite the difficulties we keep striving, at least we do if our hope is in the life to come, when we too will physically reside in Heaven. The already and the not yet, the virtue of hope strikes an even balance. Too much emphasis on one or the other leads us astray. We can't think, oh, everything's done, Jesus is in Heaven so I don't have to do anything. No, that's not how the Christian lives. Neither can we forget all that Christ has achieved, that would lead to despair. Both sentiments lead to paralysis in one's spiritual life...one stops striving then.

This tension between the two extremes is what orders us and moves us to our true home. It's a helpful tension and why hope is so very necessary...hope lifts us, moves us forward. But often times we hope too much for things of this temporary home, of this life. We hope in things that we believe will make us happy. So we hope to earn more money because there's part of us that still thinks more possessions will make me happy. We hope our favorite sports team will win the championship, because why...I'll be miserable if they don't? Parents hope their children will be the next Patrick Mahomes or Caitlyn Clark...actually they're convinced of it.

Hope in worldly things is more like optimism, it's not real hope. Optimism is an aspiration for good things in this world. And they're often disappointing. When we hope too much for earthly things we embrace this optimism that things are going to eventually be perfected in this world or in my earthly life. One of the problems with that is...Christ never made that promise, in fact he promised the opposite.

Misguided hope, or worldly optimism, leads to bitter disappoint or causes people to double down on those aspirations. A prime example is how socialism aspires to a form of utopia here on earth...it's a false promise. This is why, as Christians, we must be cautious and back away from any politician who promise that they can fix everything and that life will be perfect if only they get elected. No...our hope is in Heaven. We hope in things we believe will make us happy. But here's thing, you want to know what will make you happy...true happiness, joy...it's never found in material things or pleasures...happiness is found in goodness of person.¹ That's why God desires us to be good, because that's the key to our happiness.

Life on earth is filled with heartache and unknowns, but one thing we *can* expect in this life is to receive the grace of our Lord so that we can respond to those challenges of earthly living. And it's by responding, engaging the difficulties with God's grace that makes us holier. This is where we hope too little. We doubt God's presence or reason for my facing this challenge. We don't realize the difficulties we encounter are allowed by God precisely so that we can trust in our Lord more. We don't hope enough in the power of the sacraments, the nourishment from the Eucharist, the healing from Confession.

¹ Fr. Thomas Dubay

The Father has entrusted all power and authority to Christ His Son. That's why we have hope on earth, because the grace we receive in the sacraments comes from Christ seated at the Father's right hand. To the degree that we hope in Him we will be strengthened. It's one of the reasons for Jesus' Ascension. By hope we desire heaven and eternal life as our happiness. As the *Catechism* says, "placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit." The Ascension then is, the perfect gift of hope – it moves us from the not yet to the already. By this hope we move with Christ spiritually to join Him physically in Heaven.