

Homily for the Friday of the 6th Week of Easter

Yesterday was the Feast of the Ascension, which will be marked liturgically this Sunday.

The Psalm appointed for today is an anticipation of the Ascension. To see this clearly requires we apply an important principle of biblical interpretation that was first articulated by St. Augustine.

The New Testament is concealed in the Old, and the Old is revealed in the New.

This influences the way we read the Bible. We need to read it on two levels at once. We read the Bible in a literal sense as we read any other human literature. But we read it also in a spiritual sense, searching out what the Holy Spirit is trying to tell us through the words

This way of reading of the Bible allows us to see the Old Testament as replete with typological stories. Typology. What is that? A type is a real person, place, thing, or event in the Old Testament that foreshadows something greater in the New Testament. From “type” we get the word “typology,” the study of Christ’s foreshadowing in the Old Testament.

So with all of this in mind let’s turn to this verse from Psalm 47:

***God has gone up with a shout,
the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.***

To read this verse literally requires that we understand something about the Royal Court in ancient Near Eastern Cultures. In the royal ceremonies of those societies, when a king had mounted the dais and assumed the throne, whether on the day of his coronation or on a great state occasion, the surrounding court would acclaim the king’s rule. In the liturgical drama of the Temple the event that may have been portrayed here is a procession bearing the Ark of the Covenant. (24:7–10). So originally this verse was used in a liturgical ceremony celebrating the Lord’s presence enthroned in the Ark.

Now when we look at this verse spiritually and typologically, in light of Jesus, we see how it anticipates his Ascension into heaven. Repeatedly in the New Testament the Apostles refer to Jesus as the Lord. He has gone up to heaven and because of this we can meaningfully hear the next verse of the psalm:

Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King sing praises.

What does all of this mean for us today? When we are able to read the Bible this way we discover that there is this wonderful uniformity to the biblical witness underscoring the providential plan of God. This is so important for us to bear in mind, especially when in our lives we experience times of personal struggle and doubt, when the circumstances we are facing are so overwhelming.

When we can have a faith in God that transcends our personal experiences, we can be a people who praise God and clap our hands because our lives are joined to the narrative of God’s story.

In a sermon celebrating the Feast of the Ascension Pope Leo the Great, who was Pope from 440-461 articulated what I am trying to convey to you this way:

As followers of Christ we put unhesitating faith in what is not seen with the bodily eye; and fix our desires on what is beyond sight. Such fidelity could never be born in our hearts, nor could anyone be justified by faith, if our salvation lay only in what was visible.

We do believe in a world that is beyond our visible sight, the World that is visibly portrayed on the pages of the Holy Bible. This is the story that when read literally and spiritually can truly orientate and govern our lives.

This can allow us to hear Jesus' words which while spoken specifically in light of his impending death and Resurrection also can be read typologically as our experience through life. We will know pain and suffering now. Because of the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus our sorrow will be turned to Joy so that in the words of today's Collect we can affirm:

"Hear our prayers, O Lord, so that what was promised by the sanctifying power of your Word, may everywhere be accomplished through the working of the Gospel and that all you adopted children may attain what the testimony of truth has foretold"