

And Ascended Into Heaven

by Rev. Vladimir Berzonsky

Holy Trinity Church, Parma, Ohio

“And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?’ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll ... And between the throne and the four living creatures I saw a Lamb, standing, as if it had been slain.” (Rev. 5:2)

The very fact of our Lord’s ascension into Heaven, and His “sitting at the right hand of the Father,” is the source of great joy and profound optimism to the faithful believers. What happened when our Lord returned to Heaven? *Revelation* gives us some insight.

St. John, the spiritual leader of the churches of Asia Minor had been taken from his churches and exiled to the tiny island of Patmos, in the Mediterranean Sea. Sunday morning comes a time when he is normally preparing himself to celebrate the Holy Eucharist with his faithful gathering. Closed around by his own gloom, he is startled by a voice as loud as a trumpet, behind him. It is the Lord Himself, radiant and transformed in appearance, who takes him to an open door in Heaven for a view of the Heavenly Court.

After he does his best to adequately describe the scene before him: the Throne of the Father, the twenty-four presbyters, the four living creatures and the host of angels, he hears a challenge by a mighty angel: “Who is worthy to open the seals of the scroll?” (Upon which is written the prophecy of the destiny of the universe.)

Nobody in Heaven or on earth was worthy to reveal the future, and John wept, for not even one person had been found worthy. Except, in the center of the Heavenly court, a Lamb was standing as though it had been slain.

Jesus is that Lamb of God, “Who takes away the sins of the world.” The image of the lamb comes from the prophecy of Isaiah:

“He was oppressed and afflicted, and he opened not his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is dumb before its shearers, so he opened not his mouth.” (Isaiah 53: 7)

The Lamb has already been sacrificed. Now He is standing, erect and triumphant, glowing with life. The place where he stands is carefully noted; directly in the center of the Heavenly court, in the midst of every living being, between the Throne of the Father and the living creatures. This is the position of a priest who is offering a sacrifice.

The ascension of Jesus Christ is the return of the Son of God to the Father, in the triumph of fulfillment. Before He sits at the right hand of the Father, he offers for all time a single sacrifice for sins; "For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." (Heb. 10: 14.)

The Ascension is at once the fulfillment of God's plan for salvation of mankind, and the promise of the Gift of the Holy Spirit, who will come to abide in all who call themselves by the name of Jesus Christ, by Holy Baptism. The specific work of the Messiah is accomplished; now He will work in us, dignifying us with the responsibility for bringing the people of the earth to the Father in His Name, through the Holy Spirit at work in our members. With the Ascension, then, all is accomplished.

From Word Magazine

Publication of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America
May 1969