

Haec Dies

(Shepherd) Parson's
Poetry

"This day was made by the Lord: we rejoice and are glad, Alleluia."

Today, 40 days since Easter Day, the whole Church celebrates the Feast of Christ's Ascension. It's part of the festival of Easter, not some kind of independent feast out on its own. Originally, in fact, there wasn't any special celebration of the Ascension - it was celebrated together with the Resurrection, on Easter Sunday, or with the sending of the Spirit, on Pentecost Day. Christ's ascending to heaven is an integral part of his saving, paschal mystery, His going back to His Father bringing with Him human life made divine and victory over the power of sin and human death.

Christ's resurrection - return to His Father's right hand is His glorification, which St John, in his gospel, records Christ speaking about to His Apostles, and praying about in their presence. Have you noticed, in the Creed, and especially in the memorial eucharistic prayer of the Canon of the Mass, how closely the Ascension of Christ in glory is linked with his saving death - resurrection for us? "So, now, Lord, we celebrate the memory of Christ, your Son. We, your people - your ministers, recall his passion, his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into glory." As we celebrate today, then, this aspect of our redemption by what Christ has done, let us pray with all our hearts these Ascension-time prayers of the Church I will read for you. PRAYERS.

For a prayer in music, let's listen to an old Italian ^{song} of meditation on the Ascension of Christ: Q.

Laudario do
Cortone.

If you are at Mass today, or read for yourself the 2 scripture readings appointed for today's Mass, you may be struck by the apparent inconsistency between St Mark's gospel and the opening chapter of St Luke's Acts of the Apostles. St Mark's compressed account gives the impression that the Ascension took place on the day of the resurrection, and that the Apostles started their preaching immediately, the following day almost. Of course St Mark knew quite well they didn't start their ministry until the Holy Spirit had come visibly upon them at Pentecost. He knew too, like St Paul, that the risen Christ had been seen by various groups of disciples, in various different places, over a period of weeks - often enough for them to be quite sure He was alive again, with a new kind of life, with his own ^{human} body, they recognised but now, somehow, transformed so that it was tied down to material limitations. And then, as St Luke's account more distinctly shows, there came the day when they saw him for the last time, when He gave them, from his own lips, his final instructions from him and then disappeared again (as he'd been doing since Easter), giving them to understand that His risen life is with His Father. St Mark, in other words, is mainly intent on our understanding that Christ is alive, has made human nature divine in his going back to heaven, and is also always with us, through the action of the Holy Spirit, as we bring His message to our world. Christ's excession is for us, and this is what we must try to understand, in prayer, these days - celebrating today's Feast is

such now that just counting 40 days after Easter Sunday and remembering something that happened once long ago. This happening now, and we who are members of Christ through the consecration of ^{our} Baptism & our dedication to Him, are living His ascension with Him. What this means for us, I'd like to talk about in our next Midday Prayer, on Monday: for today, I'd like to end with two points. First, as with the Apostles when they saw Christ for the last time with human eyes, we mustn't just stand there gazing up to heaven. Christ will come back, visibly; but meanwhile we've got a job to do, as they had. They had their instructions, to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit after a few days, and then to be witnesses to Christ throughout the whole world. For us, too, devotion to Christ makes demands — it isn't an escape from earth, an unconcern for what's going on around us, a fixing of our gaze on the blue yonder and on what our future life will be like, to the neglect of what we've to do here where in fact we've already begun to live that life. And secondly, we should ponder and pray about, these days, those final instructions of Christ to his friends: it's not for us to know the time and seasons which the Father has fixed; enough for us that the Holy Spirit will come upon us & we will receive strength from him; and we are to be His witnesses, to the ends of the earth. Coming back to Jerusalem from the Mt of Olives, the Apostles went to their upper room and there, with Mary & the rest of the brethren & the women, gave themselves up to prayer.