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ASCEND WITH CHRIST

The Ascension is a feast of fulfillment. Jesus, Who was crucified and died, has come back to life: not simply with the earthly life He had for thirty-three years. Now His human nature has been transformed in resurrection splendor and His sacred humanity has entered into eternal glory. This ascent does not separate us from Him. He says to each one of us, “I am with you always” Mt 28:20).

When we see so much going wrong in a world torn apart with conflict, we take comfort in the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, “Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our profession of faith.” (Heb 4:14). Believing in Jesus, we are able to face all kinds of crises and even scandals in places where we had looked for inspiration. Reading the accounts of the Gospels, we are told about the failures of those first selected to be leaders of the faithful. These stories of weakness give us strength, for we recognize that the call to follow Jesus does not guarantee perfection but only the striving for it. When we ourselves fail, Jesus is there to lead us forward out of misery to new hope. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness but one who was tempted in every way that we are, yet never sinned” (Heb 4:15). What should be our response to such a guarantee of saving concern? “So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and favor and to find help in time of need” (4:16).

Jesus understands how our humanity can be attracted to what takes us away from goodness. In Him, we have access to divine compassion in a way no mortal mind could have fathomed. He knows our fleshly nature for He has shared it. When I am drawn to a wrong choice that satisfies an unhealthy urge in me, I have a Brother Who warns me. Through Him, I am fortified for resistance.

I can undertake a moral struggle all on my own but then I am limited to my personal strength. Philosophers have given us ethical teaching, and many of their pages are forcefully persuasive that I should go one way and not another. But to strive after virtue while turning to Jesus and asking His help in prayer is to receive far more power to resist evil and to advance in goodness. In praying, I go beyond simply reviewing my onward striving to be better. Prayer is a heart-to-heart conversation with a Savior Who I know loves me immeasurably. He gives me light to understand the significance of my actions and where they can lead me.

“I am ascending to My Father and your Father” (Jn 20:17). We rejoice that in His triumph Jesus does not leave us to our own devices. With Him, we are elevated out of the merely human. When we see our way more clearly, His grace enables us to carry out moral choices. For example, we are not simply kind in dealing with others. We embrace kindness in the name of Jesus and hear Him urging us to kind deeds. I do not try to undo impatience by pondering how patience will improve my life and my relationship with

others. I ask Jesus to help me deal with my inclination to impatience. My choice to be patient involves turning to Him. It is more than a moral decision. I appeal to Him in prayer, and in praying my choosing is much more effective. Jesus gives me empowering assistance.

“You have ascended on high, taking captivity captive,” is an old translation of Psalm 68 :19. In ascending on high, Jesus takes captive what holds us bound to earth. We ascend with Him out of the imprisonment of a fallen nature. No matter where we are in our temporal situation, whether in the dregs of degradation or on a high plane of holiness, we call to Jesus to lift us higher. No place is so low that He will not stoop to rescue us. No place is so exalted a level of spiritual insight and achievement that we stay satisfied with being there. Jesus calls sinners to sanctity. Saints hear always His summons to yet greater holiness. They understand that whatever has been accomplished in them is the work of grace. That grace urges them onward.

Jesus, you are leading me aloft from where I am, showing me how to live in ever greater fullness. The power of your Ascension inspires me to raise my heart, to reach upward. Heaven is more than a far distant vision. With You, already I participate in God’s promise, “And the promise is no less than this: everlasting life” (1 Jn 2:25).

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