

May 09, 2024 - Solemnity of Ascension "B"

[Acts 1,1-11; Ep 4, 1-13; Mc 16,15-20](#)

Homily

The Evangelist Luke is the only one who gave us a description of the Ascension of the Lord. The other three Evangelists do not separate the moment of the Resurrection from that of Jesus' definitive entry into the Father's Glory. The last chapter of Mark's gospel, that we just read, is a later addition to his Gospel, borrowed from Luke's Gospel.

Furthermore, Luke gives us two narratives of the Ascension, one at the end of his Gospel and one at the beginning of the Book of Acts. And these two narratives are not entirely concordant. Therefore, it would be futile to try to reconstruct a historical description of the events, by putting together all the elements of these two narratives. Luke's intention is not to describe an event, but to give a spiritual and theological teaching.

In his Gospel, that he calls his "first book", Luke described Jesus' life among his disciples. Then, he begins his "second book", which we call the "Acts of the Apostles" with the narrative that we just heard as first reading of this celebration. In his symbolic style, he describes how a **cloud** came down over the place where the Apostles were assembled and how Jesus, after giving them his last recommendations, disappeared in that cloud. This will be the mode of his presence among men, in the times to come. Let us pause a moment and reflect on that image of the **cloud**.

One of the key moments of the history of the Jewish People in the desert was that of the conclusion of the Covenant. Moses, leaving the people at the bottom of Mount Sinai, ascended alone the mountain that was then covered by a cloud. The Glory of the Lord remained on the mountain and the cloud covered it during six days (Ex. 24,15). Likewise, a few centuries later, when the Ark of the Covenant was intronised in the temple of Solomon, a cloud filled the house of Yahweh, and the glory of the Lord filled the whole place: to such extent that the priests could not exercise their functions because the glory of the Lord filled the place (1 Kg 8,10).

The **cloud**, in the Scripture, always means a mysterious presence of God. One cannot touch God, but He is there, at the same time hidden and revealed. His presence penetrates everything. All the wonderful narratives that we have read in our liturgical celebrations since Easter, that describe to us the primitive Church, show us the first Christians under that cloud, protected and guided by that presence of

the glory of God - the glory of Christ - dwelling in that cloud.

More than two thousand years later, we still live under that cloud that reveals to us the presence of God, whom we cannot see face to face yet. We live in the period of faith and hope. We could say that the more that cloud, that is also the symbol of the absence, makes itself tick, even oppressing, the more the presence is real and efficient.

The last chapter of Mark's Gospel, borrowed from Luke's Gospel, as I said at the beginning, reports to us the last words of Jesus before he entered into the Cloud. He speaks of the signs that will accompany those who will enter that mysterious presence: *"In my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents with their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."* These are not miracles. This is only the protection of the Lord against all the forms of evil, as long as one remains under the protection of that mysterious and hidden presence.

Nowadays, people often speak of crises : economic crisis, political and social crisis, crises of the Church and within the Church. "Crisis" is one name that is given to the cloud that covers our world. Why not to look at that cloud with the eyes of believers and see in it the presence of God transforming our world? In reality what we currently live in the Church as well as in the world is not a crisis. It is a time of **mutation**.

At times, that cloud seems to oppress us. So was it with the cloud that covered Mount Sinai when Moses ascended it in order to meet God. So was it also with the cloud that filled the Temple at the time of the intronisation of the Ark of Covenant. Such a strong presence of the glory of God that the priests could no longer perform their liturgical services (1 Kg 8,10). So was it with the persecutions that fell on the first Christians.

When the Cloud hovered over the waters, on the first day of creation, it brought the birth of life. When it hovered over Mary, it made the fullness of the divinity to come in her humanity and hours. Let us not fear all the clouds that cover us, even when they seem to oppress us. Not only God is present in it, but one of us, God made man, penetrated in it, showing to us the way and waiting for us to join Him.

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