



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Ascension of the Lord

The image of the invisible God

Readings: Acts 1: 1-11, Ps 46, Ephesians 1: 17-23, Matthew 28:16-20

Good morning everybody. Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin. We've got some very big thinking to do this morning so I will speak very slowly and in words of one syllable to help you understand. The deacon is standing by with a flannelgraph and some fuzzy felt pictures for those of you for whom words are 'a bit of a challenge'.

Now.....if I was to start a sermon like that, one word would spring immediately to mind. (Well, probably two words actually but, as we are in church, we will ignore the noun and stick with the adjective.) That word would be 'CONDESCENDING'. It would describe an attitude that was nauseatingly patronising and pretentious. It would describe a mindset that was based on a pretended superiority and would be somewhere between mildly offensive and downright laughable. The problem is for the preacher that we need to look a little at 'condescension' before we can appreciate the amazing implications of Ascension.

The word 'condescension' itself is not originally a 'boo' word. In common English use it has come to mean the demeanour of an arrogant and patronising fool. But its true and original meaning is somewhat different. To

condescend means simply, from its Latin origins, to 'get down with'. So, as you fans of gangsta rap will appreciate, 'to get down with me homies' is to spend some quality street time with old friends.

In theological terms its resonance is massive. God in Christ condescends to Man. The origin of all, the Father, Creator, eternal One gets down with His frail and mortal creatures in the person of His Beloved Son Jesus Christ. He does this, not as a patronising act. He is, after all, our true and only Father and has no need to prove anything. He does not condescend to our humanity to show off or embarrass us. He comes, in Jesus, out of a love that is beyond our wildest dreams or deserving. The Eternal One comes to inhabit time. The Immortal One subjects Himself to price of our sin by becoming mortal. The Divine empties Himself to share in our humanity and transform it. This is the great mystery of the Incarnation that is revealed at the Nativity. This is the great mystery that finds its completion and fulfilment at the Ascension of the Risen Christ.

St. Paul tells us that the One who ascended is also the One who descended, to the depths of the earth. In His death and resurrection He has broken the power of sin and death over mortal man. He has broken the gates of Hell. 'He who descended is He who ascended far above all heavens that He might fill all things.' This is the same Eternal Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, by whom, in the Book of the Genesis, God created all things. This is the same Eternal Word who became Man in the womb of Mary. This is Jesus whom St. Paul describes as *'The image of the invisible God in whom and for whom all things were created. In Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through Him reconciling all things in Heaven and on Earth and making peace by His blood shed on the Cross.'*

This is the ultimate and true condescension of God that, out of love for fallen Man He has sent His only begotten Son to dwell in our mortal tent, to pay the price of our sins, to triumph over death by His divine power and raise up our fragile mortality into an undying eternity with the Father. Without our understanding of this condescension, the Ascension of Christ might appear no more than a convenient party trick to end a baffling story. Knowing what we do, we can see the extraordinary revelation of an unimaginable hope.

Not only has God overcome death for us in Jesus but, in Jesus, fully Man and fully God, He has taken up our humanity into Himself, into His divinity. The humanisation of God in Jesus, His 'getting down with us', has climaxed in, what St. Athanasius describes as, 'the divinisation of Man'. The Risen and Ascended Christ now sits on the right hand of the Father in glory in the splendour of His imperishable divinity and in the fully translated perfection of His humanity – the glimpse of which we first caught at the Transfiguration.

This is the outrageous proclamation of the Christian Gospel. This is the destiny of the Saints. This is the far and glorious end of the weary road of every Heaven bound pilgrim.

In Jesus, God has truly 'got down with us' that, through Jesus, we might be raised up to Him forever – immortal, eternal, divine, children of God. No greater hope or promise could ever been given to the children of men.