

Sunday after the Ascension, Extraordinary Form
May 24, 2020
Father Valentin Iurochkin

Homily on the 7th Week of Easter

Dear brothers and sisters in today's first reading St Paul invites us to be responsible and earnest in prayers as an answer to the love of the One who first loved us and gave himself for us.

St. Paul in this first reading points out that everything we receive is the gift from God. The gifts given to us, being established the primacy of God as a giver of every gift, are calling for an answer to the mercy of God. And in present celebration of the Easter, the feast of the Ascension of the Lord has as its **primary goal the increased of our faith.** Ascension of Jesus has as its goal the increase of the comprehension that **everything given to us is a gift** even though sometimes it is difficult to understand it. Writes in one of his homilies Saint Leo the Great: *"At Easter, beloved brethren, it was the Lord's resurrection which was the cause of our joy; our present rejoicing in on account of the Lord's Ascension into heaven. With all due solemnity we are commemorating that day on which our poor human nature was carried up, in Christ above all the host of heaven, above all the ranks of Angels, beyond the heist heavenly powers to the very throne of God the Father".* Our Lord ascended into heaven in order to bestow on us his gifts. Being a Lamb slain for our salvation He ascended to the Father in order to ever plead and intercede before our Lord for each one of us. *"By ascending into heaven He did not abandon those whom He adopted,"* as Pope Leo says (De Resurrec., Serm. ii). Instead He always lives in order to intercede on our behalf before the Father. Then dear brethren it is precisely in our faith that we can find true solace for our souls. Yet continues St. Leo the Great: *"For such is the power of great minds, such is the light of truly believing souls, that they put unhesitating faith in what is not seen with the bodily eye; they fix their desires on what is beyond sight. Such fidelity could never be born in our hearts, nor anyone could be justified by faith, if our salvation lay only in what was visible".*

Afterwards pope Leo the Great speaks about the reality of the sacraments. In fact, now our Redeemer's visible presence has passed into the sacraments. And it is precisely through the Sacraments we are able to meet our Lord. It is in the Sacraments that we are able to have communion with Jesus. Throughout the whole history the faith of the believers would remain unshaken because the Church was strengthened, through the

communion with the Risen Lord, with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And in this communion with the risen Lord is found a “qualitative “difference of the Holy Catholic Church with respect to any other human organization. Writes pope Benedict XVI: *“Only the church, in this world goes beyond even the radically impossible frontier: the frontier of death. Living or dead, the members of the Church live in association with the same life that proceeds from the incorporation of all in the body of Christ. Of course, it must not be forgotten that expression Communion of the Saints means also to have ‘holy things’ in common, that is to say the grace of the sacraments that pours forth from the dead and resurrected Christ”*.

The Ascension of our lord doesn't mean departure into a remote region of the Universe but, rather, the continuing closeness to the disciples through the sacraments of the church which will become the source of their lasting joy. Only in the Sacraments, especially in that of the Holy Eucharist that crowns all the other sacraments (because it does contain Jesus himself), we'll be able to find lasting joy.

In the past months we were living without a possibility to have access to the sacraments. All this tough situation with the pandemic made us understand that always there runs a risk to lose the possibility to have access to the Sacraments. There always runs a risk to lose Jesus. Yet, these past months at the same time helped us to increase our appreciation of the importance of the Sacraments. Now we do really understand that there always runs a risk to lose these precious gifts of the Lord. We have begun this Homily by saying that our Lord does ascend into heaven in order to bestow on us His gifts. *"By ascending into heaven, He did not abandon those whom He adopted,"* as Pope Leo says. And He's calling upon us today to answer to all His numerous gifts. He's inviting us again to follow Him in spite of our numerous faults. Our Lord is calling upon us because He know and still believes that each one of us is able to answer Him.

Dear brethren, let us decide to assume seriously the responsibility to answer to the love of the one who first loved us. Let us ask Our Lord in today's Mass for the grace to increase our faith in Him and His providential care. Let us ask Him in built our faith on a Rock so that never any suffering and tribulation may distance us from Our Lord.