

Toward the close of the Easter season, our gospel readings, taken from Jesus' farewell discourse, (John: Ch. 14-17,) focus on the Church's future following Jesus' return to the Father.

Jesus made the following promise to his disciples: "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:2-3)

He uses the phrase 'my Father's house', to speak of Heaven. The question we must consider is what does Jesus mean by his 'Father's house', by Heaven?

The Catechism teaches that: 'This perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity – this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed – is called heaven. Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfilment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness.'⁽¹⁾

While this answer is beautiful, it is descriptive more than definitive. Pope Benedict XVI however provides us with the unequivocal answer: 'God is Heaven. He is our destination, the destination and the eternal dwelling place from which we come and for which we are striving.'⁽²⁾

So how will Jesus fulfil his promise to transport those who believe in his name, (Jn 1:12,) to his 'Father's house'? The answer I would suggest is twofold. Firstly, Jesus will come to his faithful ones following death and say: 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' (Matt 25: 34)

The soul of the disciple will then be carried up into God for 'God himself is the house with many rooms of which Jesus speaks, (Jn 14:2); God is man's home.'⁽³⁾

Secondly, given that the setting of the farewell discourse is the Last Supper, Jesus is also assuring his disciples that he will come to them each time they receive the sacraments, especially the Eucharist 'For in the most blessed Eucharist is contained the entire spiritual wealth of the Church, namely Christ himself.'⁽⁴⁾

'In the case of our own death... (Pope Benedict teaches) there is no return. Jesus, on the other hand, says of his death: "I go away, and I will come to you." It is by going away that he comes. His going ushers in a completely new and greater way of being present.'⁽⁵⁾

'During his earthly life, Jesus, like all of us, was tied to the external conditions of bodily existence: to a determined place and a determined time... And between the I and the you, there is a wall of otherness... Now he can even surmount the wall of otherness that separates the I from the you.'⁽⁶⁾

In this sense we can say that following Baptism, God/Heaven, also dwells within us, 'in God not only is there room for man; in man there is room for God.'⁽⁷⁾

This indwelling presence is realised, by the power and action of the Holy Spirit, and manifested through the communal life and sacramental worship of God's People. We are God's temple on earth, where his Holy Spirit dwells, 'The Spirit prepares men and goes out to them with his grace, in order to draw them to Christ. The Spirit manifests the risen Lord to them, recalls his word to them and opens their minds to the understanding of his death and Resurrection. He makes present the mystery of Christ, supremely in the Eucharist.'⁽⁸⁾

As a consequence of the Holy Spirit's action, the 'Christian liturgy not only recalls the events that saved us but actualises them.'⁽⁹⁾

It was by going to the Father that Jesus made this possible, because together the Father and the Son send forth the Holy Spirit into the world. It is the 'Holy Spirit, who makes it possible for Christ, who has gone away, to come now and for ever in a new way. This new coming of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, and his constant presence and action in the spiritual life are accomplished in the sacramental reality. In this reality, Christ, who has gone away in his visible humanity, comes, is present and acts in the Church in such an intimate way as to make it his own Body. As such, the Church lives, works and grows to the close of the age.'⁽¹⁰⁾

The Church is a river of Grace, that flows from the pierced side of Christ, nourishing the People of God through every generation: 'Seated at the right hand of the Father' and pouring out the Holy Spirit on his Body which is the Church, Christ now acts through the sacraments he instituted to communicate his grace.'⁽¹¹⁾

And so, let us proclaim, "Amen. Come, LORD Jesus!" (Rev 22:20)

Notes:

- (1) Catechism of the Catholic, No. 1024
- (2) Benedict XVI, Feast of the Assumption, 15/08/2012
- (3) Benedict XVI, Feast of the Assumption, 15/08/2012
- (4) Presbyterorum Ordinis, 5
- (5) Benedict xvi, homily 22/03/2008
- (6) Benedict xvi, homily 22/03/2008
- (7) Benedict XVI, Feast of the Assumption, 15/08/2012
- (8) Catechism of the Catholic Church, No.737

Rev. Kevin Webb

(9) Catechism of the Catholic Church, No.1104

(10) John Paul II, Dominum et Vivificantem, 1986, No.61

(11) Catechism of the Catholic Church, No.1084