

Open Bible

Easter 7—Ascension (Mother's Day)

May 13, 2018

Ephesians 1:18-23

¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²²And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

“Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!”

Alleluia means “Praise the Lord”.

You know how common it is at Christmas and Easter. What can the believers do but say ALLELUIA in response to God's great saving acts!

But WHY ALL THE ALLELUIAS today? Today we are celebrating the Ascension of our Lord. Alleluias are everywhere. In our processional hymn we sang ALLELUIA 42 times!

WHY ALL THE ALLELUIAS TODAY?

St Paul answers that in the text we read. The apostle writes about God's mighty power exerted in Christ. We will see what that means. Second, we are told how God exerted his mighty power for us and in us. ALLELUIA!

It is fairly easy to understand that God's “mighty strength [was] exerted when he raised Christ from the dead.” At Easter we marveled at the powerful miracle of God which raised Christ. We sang ALLELUIA.

With that same mighty strength God “seated [Christ] at his right hand in the heavenly realms.” We will confess this in the Apostle's Creed in the words: “...he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty...” That sounds like there is a throne at the Father's right and Jesus is seated there. However, we must understand that God's right hand or arm is not a localized or spacial thing. God's right hand is a metaphor for the most honored and powerful position and for God's mighty power at work. Here are a few examples:

After God had saved Israel from the Egyptian army by bringing them through the Red Sea, they sang a song of praise which included this verse: ⁶*Your right hand, LORD, was majestic in power. Your right hand, LORD, shattered the enemy. Exodus 15:6*

The metaphor is common in the Psalms: ¹⁵*Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: “The LORD's right hand has done mighty things! The LORD's right hand is lifted high; the LORD's right hand has done mighty things!” Psalm 118:15-16*

Show me the wonders of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes. Psalm 17:7

Your arm is endowed with power; your hand is strong, your right hand exalted. Psalm 89:13

Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. Psalm 98:1

So we are not to understand the right hand of God as a place or as a literal throne. Rather it is the highest position God can give with all the authority, power and glory that comes with that position.

Christ's Ascension to the right hand is the glorification of his *human nature so that the attributes of his divine nature are exercised in his human nature*. This means for instance that Christ, according to both natures is all powerful and will come again in all glory as the world's Judge. ALLELUIA!

In the meantime he is everywhere present as the God-Man who has power and authority over all things. Due to his position at the right hand of God Christ is: "*far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*" ALLELUIA!

His position as the ascended Lord comes with a Name that is above every name, as St. Paul also wrote to the Philippians: *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* (Philippians 2:9-11)

A few weeks ago England rejoiced at the birth of a new prince. He was given several names and is referred to as His Highness Prince Louie, Arthur, Charles. In spite of his impressive name he is only fifth in line to the throne and even if he were to become king, it would only be a ceremonial role. By contrast, Jesus is given a name that is above every name and it comes with a position of total supremacy over all things. ALLELUIA!

In ancient times a king showed supremacy by putting his foot on the neck or head of a vanquished enemy. In his Ascension "*God placed all things under his feet*" further showing that Christ is supreme over everything in the universe.

And God "*appointed him to be head over everything*" meaning that he has preeminence and supreme authority. All of this God accomplished by his "mighty strength" which he exerted in Christ. ALLELUIA!

God did for the sake of "*the church, which is [Christ's] body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*" Christ dwells within his church as its Head. The church is his body carrying out his will in the world. He fills the church by his presence everywhere. ALLELUIA!

But he is also head over all things for the sake of the church. Even though the church is under attack by the devil and the world, it will prevail and Christ will bear fruit through it. ALLELUIA!

To this point we have focused on what God did in Christ for us. But St Paul is thinking also about what he calls "*his incomparably great power for us who believe*" and that God "*appointed him to be head over everything for the church*". This was God's purpose in all that he did in Christ, to rescue and save us who are captives of sin. God not only provided salvation through Christ, but exerted his power *in us* to save us. In the next chapter St. Paul writes: "*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.* (Ephesians 2:4,5)

By nature we are spiritually dead, dead in transgressions—completely unable to live in fellowship with God, who requires purity and righteousness. By nature our minds, will and body are captive to sin. But by his power working in us God gave us new birth, creating a new spiritual nature that loves him and wants to do his will. Our inborn nature of sin and our new spiritual nature are at war, both trying to rule over us. Sin resists the takeover. The new nature seeks to make every part of us captive to Christ. The new spiritual life is powered by Holy Spirit in our Baptism, the Word of God and the Lord's Supper. We want to remember our Baptism daily and return to it by confessing our sins. We want to use God's Word and the Lord's Supper to empower the new nature to make our whole mind, body and will captive to Christ. There is an UNFORTUNATELY and a FORTUNATELY involved in this. UNFORTUNATELY, as long as we live, no matter how hard we try, our flesh will still be sinful. FORTUNATELY, as St. Paul writes: *it is by grace you have been saved*" that is, our salvation is not something we earn but God's gift purchased by Christ. Through Christ God has worked powerfully to prepare us for our ascension by the gift of salvation. Who would not say ALLELUIA to that?

We could never say or sing enough ALLELUIAS to thank God for exerting his power in Christ to raise him from the dead and seat him at his right hand in heaven where he rules over all things for the sake of his church. We could never thank God enough for exerting his power in us to transform us into his forgiven child. WHY ALL THE ALLELUIAS? Now you know. ALLELUIA! Amen.