

Ascension

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into Heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into Heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into Heaven.” (Acts 1:11) As we celebrate the feast of Jesus’s Ascension today, we are reminded by these words from the angels that Jesus’s Ascension into Heaven is temporary and He will be returning one day in the same way that he has left. Jesus ascended into Heaven that He might bring human nature into Heaven and have it seated at the right hand of the Father. But one day He will be returning at the end of time to judge the living and the dead. Christian time is linear and has a beginning and an end. It has an Alpha and an Omega.

We are now living in the time between Christ’s Ascension and His second coming, when he will return riding upon the clouds and surrounded by angels. We must be vigilant in prayer during this time like in the parable of the man who travels to a far country and the doorkeeper does not know when he will be returning. “Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming - in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning - lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!” (Mk. 13:35-37)

St. Paisios the Athonite tells a story about the power of prayer from a simple, but sincerely God-loving monk. “I remember an elderly monk at Esphigmenou Monastery [on Mt. Athos], who was so simple that he thought ‘Ascension’ was a woman Saint. He prayed to her on his [prayer rope]: ‘Saint of God intercede for us!’ Once, he had to feed a sick Brother in the infirmary; and had nothing to offer him. He immediately went down the stairs, opened a window that overlooked the sea, stretched out his arms and said: ‘Ascension, my Saint, give me a little fish for the Brother.’ And right away, as if by miracle, a big fish jumped out of the sea and into his hands. The others who saw were astonished. But he simply looked at them, smiling, as if he were saying: ‘What’s so strange about what you have just seen?’ And then, look at us. We may know everything about the life and martyrdom of the Saints, or about when and how the Ascension took place. And yet, we cannot even catch a tiny fish! These are the strange and paradoxical things of the spiritual life, which the reasoning of those intellectuals - who are centered on themselves, and not on God - cannot explain. Because their knowledge is of this world, and sterile; their spirit is ill with secularism, and their mind void of the Holy Spirit.”

Prayer can change the world, if we have simple faith, like this monk. Jesus will not ask us at His return how many things we know about our Faith, how many holy days there are during the year, etc., but He will ask us whether we have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and visited the sick and imprisoned. Let us pray continuously that we may pass this test.