

A Reading from a Sermon on the Ascension St Augustine

Today Jesus Christ our Lord went up to heaven: let our hearts go up with him.

Listen to the words of Saint Paul: "If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth." Just as he ascended without leaving us, so too we are already with him in heaven, although his promises have not yet been fulfilled in our bodies.

Christ is now raised above the heavens; but he still experiences on earth whatever sufferings we his members feel. He showed that this is true when he called out from heaven: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" And: "I was thirsty and you gave me drink."

Why then do we not exert ourselves on earth so as to be happy with him already in heaven through the faith, hope and charity which unite us with him? Christ, while in heaven, is also with us; and we, while on earth, are also with him. He is with us in his godhead and his power and his love; and we, though we cannot be with him in godhead as he is with us, can be with him in our love, our love for him.

He did not leave heaven when he came down to us from heaven; and he did not leave us when he ascended to heaven again. His own words show that he was in heaven while he was here. He said, "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man, who is in heaven."

He said this because of the unity between us and himself, for he is our head and we are his body. The words "no one but he" are true, since we are Christ, in the sense that he is the Son of man because of us, and we are the children of God because of him.

For this reason, St Paul says, "Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is also with Christ." He does not say "so it is with Christ" but "so it is also with Christ." So Christ is many members but one body.

He came down from heaven, then, in mercy. And it is he alone who has ascended, since we are in him through grace. This is why no one has descended but Christ and no one but Christ has ascended: not that the dignity of the head is fused with the body but that the body in its unity is not separated from its head.