

The Christian faith, especially the Orthodox Faith, aims quite high. It already starts with ; The invisible, unknowable God has descended to our world, descended to our earth, took on a body and became man. God, the creator of all that exists, has become man. He has been given a face, a human face, and a name, Jesus Christ. And now He has ascended to Heaven, to the Father, also as a human being. He has, with his human body, gone back to God the Father, gone back to how man was in the beginning, in God's likeness and image. And He became man to open the way for us humans to follow Him, back to our original oneness with God the Father. He has come down to our reality to get us and bring us back to God the Father.

There is perhaps no more powerful sign of our salvation than the Ascension, for it makes clear that our Lord has raised us up - not only from the grave, not only from hades - but has raised us to the Eternal Life of the Holy Trinity. We truly become partakers of God, partakers of Divine Nature by grace, in our ascended Lord. And we are reminded by the Ascension that Jesus Christ is not just a great teacher or example or even an angel or lesser god. As the Fathers of the Council of Nicaea proclaimed, He is the Light of Light, the true God of the true God, one in essence with the Father . For only One who is truly Divine and eternal can ascend to heaven and bring us into the Divine, Eternal Life of the Holy Trinity. Therefore, the Council of Nicaea rejected the teachings of Arius, who did not think that the Son was completely divine. That is why the Orthodox Church has always disagreed with those who deny the full divinity of our Lord or His complete humanity. For only One who is truly both God and man can bring people into the Life of God.

The Son prayed to the Father that His followers "may be one as We...that they may all be one, like You, Father in Me and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You have sent Me. And the glory which You have given Me I have given them, that they may be one as We are one..."

Here is a very high, very lofty view of what it means to be a man in the image and likeness of God. In the Body of Christ, the Church, we must be one in Him and show the unity of Holiness and Love that characterize the Holy Trinity. Christ has given us His Glory, a share in eternal life, the life to which He has ascended as the Redeemer of the world. And that Glory, that Eternal Life, is not an individual undertaking; it is the life of unity in Christ, of His Body, the Church, of which we are all members through baptism.

Sadly, we have all fallen short of living in Christ. The truth is, we often prefer not to ascend in Him to a life of holiness. We would rather do things that are below us, that are not befitting of those who are created in the image and likeness of God, those who are called to live the Heavenly Life even now. Instead of dwelling on what is true, noble, just and pure, we too often dwell on what fuels our passions, our self-centered desires.

Let us nevertheless celebrate the Ascension by embracing the great dignity that is ours in the God-Man who has ascended to heaven. Let us pay close attention to our thoughts, words and deeds, and stop doing what is below us and live as those called to the Glory of the Kingdom.