

We Live in Christian Hope

Acts 1: 1-11; Ps. 47; Eph. 1: 17-23; Lk. 24: 44-53

This Sunday, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord. In the Collect, we pray the following words:

Gladden us with holy joys, almighty God, and make us rejoice with devout thanksgiving, for the Ascension of Christ your Son is our exaltation, and where the Head has gone before in glory, the Body is called to follow in hope.

One of the key characteristics of a Christian is hopefulness. We are meant to be filled with hope because of the promise of Jesus Christ, that we who believe in Him can expect to follow Him to heaven. And this is not 'ordinary hope' where we have the uncertain expectation of something happening. For example, imagine if I buy a lottery ticket with a prize of \$50 million! I would probably buy the ticket and say: 'I hope I win.' I hope for the good outcome while knowing that the chances are infinitesimal of winning.

But imagine if, when the winning numbers for the lottery are announced, I check my ticket and find that I am a winner! Now I might say: 'I hope to go to the Lottery Office tomorrow to collect my winnings.' In this case, I am sure that I have won the prize. The only uncertainty is when I will go to collect it.

Jesus promised that we who believe in Him will follow Him to heaven. We know that we have won the prize. We just don't know when we will be able to claim it and take our place in heaven. This is 'Christian hope'.

In the Second Reading, St. Paul tells us:

'...so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power for us who believe...'

Paul tells us of the 'glorious inheritance' that awaits us. In order for us to gain an inheritance, someone has to die and leave it for us. If no one dies, there can be no inheritance; we cannot be heirs. Jesus died so that we who believe could inherit everlasting life in heaven.

At the time of Paul, an inheritance was passed down from generation to generation through legal succession. The eldest son not only had the expectation but also the legal right to receive an inheritance from his father when the father passed away. In the same way, Paul tells us that we are entitled to our inheritance because of our faith in Jesus.

We demonstrate our faith in Jesus by following His commandments, to proclaim the Good News to all nations in His name, regardless of challenges, disappointments, persecutions and setbacks. If we do this, we can be confident that we are heirs to the Kingdom and that, when our life in this world is over, we will be able to claim the inheritance that Jesus left for us.