

## Saint\_Thomas\_explains\_the\_Gospel\_for\_Ascension\_Thursday.

*At length he appeared to the eleven as they were at table: and he upbraided them with their incredulity and hardness of heart, because they did not believe them who had seen him after he was risen again. And he said to them: Go ye into the whole world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be condemned. And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name they shall cast out devils: they shall speak with new tongues. They shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them: they shall lay their hands upon the sick, and they shall recover. And the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God. But they going forth preached everywhere: the Lord working withal, and confirming the word with signs that followed.*

GLOSS. Mark, when about to finish his Gospel, relates the last appearance of our Lord to His disciples after His resurrection, saying, For the last time he appeared to the eleven as they sat at meat.

GREG. We should observe that Luke says in the Acts, As he was eating with them he commanded, that they should not depart from Jerusalem, and shortly afterwards, while they beheld he was taken up. For He ate, and then ascended, that by the act of eating, the truth of the flesh might be declared; wherefore it is also here said, that he appeared to them for the last time as they sat at meat.

PSEUDO-JEROME; But He appeared when all the eleven were together, that all might be witnesses, and relate to all men what they had seen and heard in common. It goes on: And upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them who had seen him after his resurrection.

AUG. But how was this done the last time? The last occasion on which the Apostles saw the Lord upon earth happened forty days after the resurrection; but would He then have upbraided them for not believing those who had seen Him risen, when they themselves had so often seen Him after His resurrection? It remains therefore that we should understand that Mark wished to say it in few words, and said for the last time, because it was the last time that He showed Himself that day, as night was coming on, when the disciples returned from the country into Jerusalem, and found, as Luke says, the eleven and those who were with them, speaking together concerning the resurrection of our Lord.

But there were some there who did not believe; when these then were sitting at meat, (as Mark says,) and were still speaking, (as Luke relates,) The Lord stood in the midst of them, and said to them, Peace be to you; as Luke and John say. The rebuke therefore which Mark here mentions, must have been amongst those words, which Luke and John say, that the Lord at that time spoke to the disciples. But another question is raised, how Mark says that He appeared when the eleven sat at meat, if the time was the first part of the night on the Lord's day, when John plainly says that Thomas was not with them, who, we believe, had gone out, before the Lord came in to them, after those two had returned from the village, and spoken with the eleven, as we find in Luke's Gospel.

But Luke in his relation leaves room for supposing that Thomas went out first, while they spoke these things, and that the Lord entered afterwards; Mark however from his

saying, for the last time he appeared to the eleven as they sat at meat, forces us to believe that he was there, unless indeed, though one of them was absent he chose to call them the eleven, because the company of the Apostles was then called by this number, before Matthias was chosen into the place of Judas. Or if this be a harsh way of understanding it, let us understand that it means that after many appearances, He showed Himself for the last time, that is, on the fortieth day, to the Apostles, as they sat at meat, and that since He was about to ascend from them, He rather wished on that day to reprove them for not having believed those who had seen Him risen before seeing Him themselves, because after His ascension even the Gentiles on their preaching were to believe a Gospel, which they had not seen.

And so the same Mark immediately after that rebuke says, And he said to them, Go you into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. And lower down, He that believes not shall be condemned. Since then they were to preach this, were not they themselves to be first rebuked, because before they saw the Lord they had not believed those to who He had first appeared?

GREG. Another reason also why our Lord rebuked His disciples, when He left them as to His bodily presence, was, that the words which He spoke on leaving them might remain more deeply impressed, upon the hearts of His hearers.

PSEUDO-JEROME; But He rebukes their want of faith, that faith might take its place; He rebukes the hardness of their stony heart, that the fleshy heart, full of love, might take its place.

GREG. After rebuking the hardness of their hearts, let us hear the words of advice which He speaks. For it goes on: Go you into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. Every man must be understood by every creature; for man partakes something of every creature; he has existence as have stones, life as trees, feeling as animals, understanding as have Angels. For the Gospel is preached to every creature, because he is taught by it, for whose sake all are created, whom all things are in some way like, and from whom therefore they are not alien. By the name of every creature also every nation of the Gentiles may be meant. For it had been said before, Go not into the way of the Gentiles. But now it is said, Preach the Gospel to every creature, so that the preaching of the Apostles which was thrust aside by Judea, might be an assistance to us, since Judea, had haughtily rejected it, thus witnessing to her own damnation.

THEOPHYL. Or else; to every creature, that is, whether believing or unbelieving. It goes on: He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. For it is not enough to believe, for he who believes and is not baptized, but is a catechumen, has not yet attained to perfect salvation.

GREG. But perhaps some one may say in himself, I have already believed, I shall be saved. He says what is true, if he keeps his faith by works; for that is a true faith, which does not contradict by its deeds what it says in words. There follows: But he that believes not shall be damned.

BEDE; What shall we say here about infants, who by reason of their age cannot yet believe; for as to older persons there is no question. In the Church then of our Savior children believe by others, as also they drew from others the sins which are remitted to them in baptism. It goes on: And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents.

THEOPHYL. That is, they shall scatter before them serpents, whether intellectual or sensible, as it is said, you shall tread upon serpents and scorpions, which is understood spiritually. But it may also mean sensible serpents, as when Paul received no hurt from the viper. There follows: And if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them. We read of many such cases in history, for many persons have drank poison unhurt, by guarding themselves with the sign of Christ. It goes on: They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

GREG. Are we then without faith because we cannot do these signs? Nay, but these things were necessary in the beginning of the Church, for the faith of believers was to be nourished by miracles, that it might increase. Thus we also, when we plant groves, pour water upon them, until we see that they have grown strong in the earth; but when once they have firmly fixed their roots, we leave off irrigating them. These signs and miracles have other things which we ought to consider more minutely.

For Holy Church does every day in spirit what then the Apostles did in body; for when her Priests by the grace of exorcism lay their hands on believers, and forbid the evil spirits to dwell in their minds, what do they, but cast out devils? And the faithful who have left earthly words, and whose tongues sound forth the Holy Mysteries, speak a new language; they who by their good warnings take away evil from the hearts of others, take up serpents; and when they are hearing words of pestilent persuasion, without being at all drawn aside to evil doing, they drink a deadly thing, but it will never hurt them; whenever they see their neighbors growing weak in good works, and by their good example strengthen their life, they lay their hands on the sick, that they may recover. And all these miracles are greater in proportion as they are spiritual, and by them souls and not bodies are raised.

PSEUDO-JEROME; The Lord Jesus, who had descended from heaven to give liberty to our weak nature, Himself also ascended above the heavens; wherefore it is said, So then after the Lord had spoken to them, he was received up into heaven.

AUG. By which words He seems to show clearly enough that the foregoing discourse was the last that He spoke to them upon earth, though it does not appear to bind us down altogether to this opinion. For He does not say, After He had thus spoken to them, wherefore it admits of being understood not as if that was the last discourse, but that the words which are here used, After the Lord had spoken to them, he was received into heaven, might belong to all His other discourses. But since the arguments which we have used above make us rather suppose that this was the last time, therefore we ought to believe that after these words, together with those which are recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, our Lord ascended into heaven.

GREG. We have seen in the Old Testament that Elias was taken up into heaven. But the ethereal heaven is one thing, the aerial is another. The aerial heaven is nearer the earth, Elias then was raised into the aerial heaven, that he might be carried off suddenly into some secret region of the earth, there to live in great calmness of body and spirit, until he return at the end of the world, and pay the debt of death. We may also observe that Elias mounted up in a chariot, that by this they might understand that a mere man requires help from without. But our Redeemer, as we read, was not carried up by a chariot, not by angels, because He who had made all things was borne over all by His own power. We must also consider what Mark subjoins, And sat at the right hand of God, since Stephen says, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. Now sitting is the attitude of a judge, standing of one fighting or helping. Therefore Stephen, when toiling in the contest, saw Him standing whom he had for his helper; but Mark describes Him as sitting after His assumption into heaven, because after the glory of His assumption, He will in the end be seen as a judge.

AUG. Let us not therefore understand this sitting as though He were placed there in human limbs, as if the Father sat on the left, the Son on the right, but by the right hand itself we understand the power which He as man received from God, that He should come to judge, who first had come to be judged. For by sitting we express habitation, as we say of a person, he sat himself down in that country for many years; in this way then believe that Christ dwells at the right hand of God the Father. For or He is blessed and dwells in blessedness, which is called the right hand of the Father; for all is right hand there, since there is no misery.

It goes on: And they went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs and wonders.

BEDE; Observe that in proportion as Mark began his history later, so he makes it reach in writing to more distant times, for he began from the commencement of the preaching of the Gospel by John, and he reaches in his narrative those times in which the Apostles sowed the same word of the Gospel throughout the world.

GREG. But what should we consider in these words, if it be not that obedience follows the precept and signs follow the obedience? For the Lord had commanded them, Go into all the world preaching the Gospel, and, you shall be witnesses even to the ends of the earth.

AUG. But how was this preaching fulfilled by the Apostles, since there are many nations in which it has just begun, and others in which it has not yet begun to be fulfilled? Truly then this precept was not so laid upon the Apostles by our Lord, as though they alone to whom He then spoke were to fulfill so great a charge; in the same way as He says, Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the world, apparently to them alone; but who does not understand that the promise is made to the Catholic Church, which though some are dying, others are born, shall be here to the end of the world?

THEOPHYL. But we must also know from this that words are confirmed by deeds as then in the Apostles works confirmed their words, for signs followed. Grant then, O Christ,

that the good words which we speak may working confirmed by works and deeds, so that at the last, You working with us in word and in deed, we may be perfect, for Yours as is fitting is the glory both of word and deed. Amen.

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