



JESUS CHRIST
His Ascension into heaven
Texts from the
Catechism of the Catholic Church

‘He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father’ (Article 6, Apostles Creed)

Christ’s body was glorified at the moment of his Resurrection, as proved by the new and supernatural properties it subsequently and permanently enjoys. But during the forty days when he eats and drinks familiarly with his disciples and teaches them about the kingdom, his glory remains veiled under the appearance of ordinary humanity.

Jesus final apparition ends with the irreversible entry of his humanity into divine glory, symbolised by the cloud and by heaven, where he is seated from that time onward at God’s right hand. (659)

The historical and transcendent event of the Ascension

The veiled character of the glory of the Risen One during this time is intimated in his mysterious words to Mary Magdalene: ‘I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ (Jn 20:17)

This indicates a difference in manifestation between the glory of the risen Christ and that of the Christ exalted to the Father’s right hand, a transition marked by the historical and transcendent event of the Ascension. (660)

Christ descended from heaven in the Incarnation and ascends now to open heaven for us - where he, our Head, has gone we hope to follow

The final stage stays closely linked to the first, that is, to his descent from heaven in the Incarnation. Only the one who ‘came from the Father’ can return to the Father: Christ Jesus. ‘No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.’ (Jn 3:13)

Left to its own natural powers humanity does not have access to ‘the Father’s house’, to God’s life and happiness. Only Christ can open to man such access that we, his members, might have confidence that we too shall go where he, our Head and our Source, has preceded us. (661)

The lifting up of Jesus on the Cross signifies and announces his lifting up by his Ascension - he is our eternal high priest

‘And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.’ (Jn 12:32) The lifting up of Jesus on the cross signifies and announces his lifting up by his Ascension into heaven, and indeed begins it.

Jesus Christ, the one priest of the new and eternal Covenant, ‘entered, not into a sanctuary made by human hands.... but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.’ (Heb 9:24) There Christ permanently exercises his priesthood, for he ‘always lives to make intercession’ for ‘those who draw near to God through him.’ (Heb 7:25)

As ‘high priest of the good things to come’ he is the centre and the principal actor of the liturgy that honours the Father in heaven. (662)

Seated at the right hand of the Father

‘By “the Father’s right hand” we understand the glory and honour of divinity, where he who exists as Son of God before all ages, indeed as God, of one being with the Father, is seated bodily after he became incarnate and his flesh was glorified.’ (St John Damascene) (663)

Being seated at the Father’s right hand signifies the inauguration of the Messiah’s kingdom, the fulfilment of the prophet Daniel’s vision concerning the Son of Man: ‘To him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away,

and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.’ (Dan 7:14). After this event the apostles became witnesses of the ‘kingdom [that] will have no end’. (Nicene Creed) (664)

Christ is Lord of the cosmos and of history

‘Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.’ (Rom 14:9) Christ’s Ascension into heaven signifies his participation, in his humanity, in God’s power and authority. Jesus Christ is Lord: he possesses all power in heaven and on earth. He is ‘far above all rule and authority and power and dominion’, for the Father ‘has put all things under his feet.’ (Eph 1:20-22) Christ is Lord of the cosmos and of history. In him human history and indeed all creation are ‘set forth’ and transcendentally fulfilled. (668)

Christ dwells on earth in his Church

As Lord, Christ is also head of the Church, which is his Body. Taken up to heaven and glorified after he had thus fully accomplished his mission, Christ dwells on earth in his Church. The redemption is the source of the authority that Christ, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, exercises over the Church. ‘The kingdom of Christ is already present in mystery’, ‘on earth, the seed and the beginning of the kingdom’. (669)

Since the Ascension God’s plan has entered into its fulfilment. We are already at ‘the last hour’. ‘Already the final age of the world is with us, and the renewal of the world is irrevocably under way; it is even now anticipated in a certain real way, for the Church on earth is endowed already with a sanctity that is real but imperfect.’ Christ’s kingdom already manifests its presence through the miraculous signs that attend its proclamation by the Church. (670)

Christ’s coming in glory is now imminent

Since the Ascension Christ’s coming in glory has been imminent, even though ‘it is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority.’ (Acts 1:7) This final coming could be accomplished at any moment, even if both it and the final trial that will precede it are delayed. (673)

IN BRIEF

- **Christ’s Ascension marks the definitive entrance of Jesus’ humanity into God’s heavenly domain, whence he will come again (cf. Acts 1:11); this humanity in the meantime hides him from the eyes of men (cf. Col 3:3) (665)**
- **Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, precedes us into the Father’s glorious kingdom so that we, the members of his Body, may live in the hope of one day being with him for ever. (666)**
- **Jesus Christ, having entered the sanctuary of heaven once and for all, intercedes constantly for us as the mediator who assures us of the permanent outpouring of the Holy Spirit. (667)**
- **Christ the Lord already reigns through the Church, but all the things of this world are not yet subjected to him. The triumph of God’s kingdom will not come about without one last assault by the powers of evil. (680)**

