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## ASCENSION

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU  
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault  
(Fontgombault, May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2025)

*In illo uno unum.*

In Him Who is One, we are one.  
(St. AUGUSTINE, *Exposition on Psalm 127*)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,  
My dearly beloved Sons,

**T**HE READING TAKEN from the Acts of the Apostles emphasises the difference of outlook between the Lord and His disciples, as He is about to take leave of them.

The time has come for Him to give His last instructions, during the days between His resurrection and His ascension. He invites His disciples to remain in Jerusalem, and to await there the Promised One of the Father, the Holy Spirit, a strength that will give them to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, and unto the ends of the earth. Above all, He talks to them about the Kingdom of God.

For the disciples, the issue is totally different: “Lord, has the time come when Thou wilt restore the kingdom to Israel?”<sup>a</sup> The Lord’s answer leaves them unsatisfied: “It is not for you to know the times or moments which the Father has fixed by His own authority.”<sup>b</sup>

*a. Acts 1:6.*

*b. v. 7.*

Let us also remember the dissent between the apostles at the beginning of the Last Supper, as reported by St. Luke. Jesus has just told them:

With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you, before I suffer. For I say to you that from this time I will not eat it, till it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.<sup>c</sup>

*c. Lk 22:15-16.*

In such a solemn context, the disciples have other concerns:

And there was also a strife amongst them, which of them should seem to be the greater.<sup>d</sup>

*d. Lk 22:24.*

We are forced to recognize that the apostles haven't fully understood the meaning of the work of Jesus, the meaning of the Paschal mystery, His death and resurrection, of which they have received as their mission to be the witnesses. No, the point for Christ is not to establish an earthly kingdom, but to make of them fishers of men. No, the point for them is not to vie for the best possible place, but to make themselves servants. There lies the best place. There lies the most perfect imitation of Christ, Who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."<sup>e</sup>

*e. Mk 10:45.*

However, after this disappointing exchange, as the apostles are looking at Christ, He is lifted up, taken up into heaven in a cloud. St. Luke adds in the conclusion of his gospel that lifting up His hands, He blessed the disciples. These went then back to Jerusalem with great joy.

After Jesus has blessed them, the quest for honours, the hope to establish an earthly kingdom where they would possess the best places, seem to have vanished from the disciples' hearts.

The focal point on which all eyes converge is Christ. Whereas He has now disappeared, all eyes remain fixed on the place where He was last seen. Two angels have received the mission to draw the apostles out of their ecstasy:

Ye men of Galilee, why stand you looking up to heaven? This Jesus Who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come as you have seen Him going into heaven.<sup>f</sup>

*f. Acts 1:11.*

If their eyes turn away from heaven, their hearts remain fixed on Christ. The Ascension under that respect seems

to have been a decisive moment. The eyes of each of the apostles set on Christ, and above all the Lord's blessing, have converted their hearts.

The apostles are now ready to enter into a great retreat, which is to prepare them to receive the gift of the Spirit and to burn with His fire.

These last weeks, the Church has lived a great retreat, too. Pope Francis' last weeks, marked by suffering and disease, and consecrated by the offering of his life for peace in the world; the moments of the conclave, followed by the election of Pope Leo, have given rise to a great movement of prayer. The hearts of all have turned towards the Lord, Who is the source of all blessings.

It seems to me that Pope Leo's motto — *In Him Who is One, we are one* — is characteristic of this movement of prayer, and sketches out a secure path for those who want to follow Christ, become His witnesses, and serve the Church.

This motto is taken from a sermon of St. Augustine on Psalm 127:

Christians, together with their Head that has been taken up into heaven, make up but one Christ. He is not One, and we many; but we who are many, in Him who is One we are one. There is thus but one man, Christ, Head and body. What is this body? His Church.<sup>g</sup>

*g. Exposition on Psalm 127, n. 3 (PL 37:1679).*

St. Benedict is quite aware of this theme. In chapter 2 of his Rule, he writes:

For whether bond or free, we are all one in Christ, and we all bear an equal burden of servitude under one Lord.

For that matter, both St. Augustine and St. Benedict are merely quoting St. Paul to the Galatians:

For as many of you as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.<sup>h</sup>

*h. Gal 3:27-28.*

St. Paul illustrates this communion of all in Christ with the analogy of the body:

But now God hath set the members, every one of them, in the body as it hath pleased Him. [...] That there might be no schism in the body: but the members might be mutually careful one for another. And if one member suffer any thing, all the members suffer with it: or if one member glory, all the members rejoice with it.<sup>i</sup>

*i. I Co 12:18,25,26.*

We are called to work at this unity, for which the Lord prayed on the eve of His death:

That they may be made perfect in one: and the world may know that Thou hast sent Me and hast loved them, as Thou hast also loved Me.<sup>j</sup>

*j. Jn 17:23.*

Let us remain in a retreat, as the apostles with Mary. Let's take advantage of this time to examine our conscience. Are we destroying the body, the Church, or are we working at her integrity? Don't let us squander our strength in the pursuit of earthly goods. Let us implore the blessing of Jesus, and become His credible witnesses unto the ends of the earth. Let us implore the gift of peace and unity, for the world, for the Church, in our families and communities, in our own hearts.

*In illo uno, unum. Amen, Alleluia.*

