

“Christ’s Ministry Continues”

What is Jesus doing right now? That’s a question I ask the catechumens as we are studying the Second Article of the Creed. I have them take a look at all the “major verbs” in the Second Article – what’s Christ doing?

Already He has been conceived and born – He has suffered, was crucified, died and was buried – He descended into hell – on the third day He rose again --- and as we celebrate today, He has “ascended into heaven” --- and He will come again on the Last Day to judge the living and the dead.

But what’s He doing now? In the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed – there is only one major verb that is in the present tense. Right now, in the present – Jesus, our Ascended Lord – “sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.”

So, Jesus is just sitting around? Many days it sure seems like He’s taking it easy, not paying attention – as the world, the devil and our own sinful nature run amuck!

What does this mean that Jesus “sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty”? It means that He exercises all the power and authority of God Almighty – that He is presently ruling and reigning over all things.

It means that He is constantly before the Father on your behalf – defending you with His bloody wounds, reminding the Father that His blood cleanses you from all sin. It means that, right now, Jesus is ministering to you – serving you.

Now for some people, this would leave them scratching their heads. It’s such a disconnect – “this is why the Church is irrelevant, they’ve got their heads in the clouds.” And you know what, there’s some truth in that – the Church does have its head in the clouds.

I’ll get to the cloud in a bit, but first, St. Luke here in our text, says that in his “first book” (that is, the Gospel According to St. Luke), he dealt with “all that Jesus BEGAN to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up (referring to His ascension), after He gave commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen.”

The record of Jesus' ministry BEGAN in the Gospel of St. Luke – but it CONTINUES here in the Acts of the Apostles. The ministry of Jesus doesn't come to an end with His Ascension – it continues through the ministry of “the apostles whom He had chosen” – even to this very day.

With the apostles you hear the same preaching and teaching that you hear from Jesus. They perform the same miracles that Jesus performed before His Ascension – because as Jesus had promised them, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt. 28:20). Or, as we hear at the end of St. Mark's Gospel: “And they [the apostles] went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.” (16:20)

What Jesus BEGAN with His public, earthly, ministry – He continues, even to “the end of the age” – exercising all the power and authority of God – ruling and reigning over all things – interceding on your behalf before the Father --- ministering, serving, you.

The apostles – these “sent ones” of Jesus – are uniquely qualified to carry on His ministry. They had received His commands – the things that Jesus mandates be done in His name, and in His Church – to preach, to baptize, to absolve, to feed His flock with His Supper.

They were eyewitnesses of His resurrection – which will be a great source of encouragement to be faithful to the task, especially when their lives are on the line. Jesus has opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. They are empowered by the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus poured out on them, just ten days after His Ascension.

“And when He had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight.” No, the apostles and the Church don't have their heads in the clouds – as if they are trying to see what is going on in heaven – but their head is in the cloud, in the sense that, the cloud hides Jesus from their sight.

In that respect, they are just like us – we are just like them – we live, not by sight, but by faith. And that's the struggle we face. We want to take control – we want to be the ones to determine what is true – it's hard to listen to God's Word and say, “amen/true.”

Our experience in the world tells us that God is not here – that Christ has abandoned us – that God is dead, or at least has gone away for a little alone time. And there are plenty who would pile on and say – “Yep, that is what is really true ... Christianity? It’s irrelevant ... Time to give it up ... Time for a reality check.”

Dearly beloved, that is why the Ascension of Our Lord is so important. That is why God’s Word reveals to us what He is presently doing – showing us that “sitting at the right hand of God the Father Almighty” is vital – for in so doing, the Jesus who is with us always, is at the same time ruling and reigning over all things, for our benefit.

Like the apostles, Jesus has equipped us to live by faith in these times between His Ascension into heaven and His return on the Last Day – in these days when we must live by faith, not by sight.

Jesus continues to serve you by the very means that He has mandated for His Church. He rules and reigns over the devil, the world, and your sinful nature – by the preaching of His victorious resurrection from the dead.

He rules and reigns over your sin and guilt by the absolution achieved by His blood. He rules and reigns over your temptations by putting to death your sinful desires and resurrecting a new man in Holy Baptism.

He rules and reigns over your weaknesses, your fears, your isolation – by gathering you to His feast, giving you the very same body and blood that suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried – and raised to life again – and even now, is sitting at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, and is with you always.

Today, you cannot see with your eyes the Christ who is in the midst of you – ministering to your every need – but on the Last Day, you will see Him coming on the clouds – and what is now hidden, you will see with your very own eyes.

You will see the resurrected and ascended Christ – the Christ who comes to judge you, still bearing the wounds of His crucifixion, and promising that He is “for you,” given and shed “for the forgiveness of all your sins.”

On that day you will see and experience what is already true today – that Christ has not abandoned you – but that He continues to serve you --- and when our heavenly Father says that the time and season is right, He will send His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord – to take you to be with Him – ascending with Him, to dwell with the Father and the Holy Spirit for all eternity. This is most certainly true.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.