

(For Monday, May 22, 2017) **What did you expect?**

“And he [God] said to me, ‘Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me this very day.’” (Ez.2:3, ESV)

The readings for the Feast Day of Ascension (this Thursday) begin with Ezekiel’s commissioning. In a way, Ezekiel’s call is the model by which each believer is called to do God’s will. And we are not called to Disneyland! No, God sends his witnesses to those who are in greatest need. And this need is also immediate (note – they *“have transgressed me this very day”*). We should not be surprised to find ourselves in situations and among people in crisis. God sends his servants where they are needed most, and that is rarely to situations of placid order – unless that order is based on the false assumptions of this world and its superficial and vanishing gratification.

Are you surprised to be in the very thick of Spiritual struggles? You shouldn’t be. That’s where you’re most needed!

(For Tuesday, May 23, 2017) **What’s our best defense?**

“Out of the moths of babies and infants, you [God] have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.” (Ps.8:2, ESV)

In the Third Century BC, the scholars who translated this verse from Hebrew to Greek rendered the word “strength” into what we in English call “praise.” Apparently, praising God is our ultimate defense against the spiritual attacks of Satan. And the product of this praising of God provides “stillness.” Notice how this same “stillness” is applied to both “the enemy” (Satan) and “the avenger” (those in the camp of Jesus). The Hebrew word for “to still” is *shabbah*. It’s where we get our concept of “Sabbath rest.” Understood this way, the pure and simple praise of God is our most effective way of halting the advances of evil, and of achieving that quiet rest the soul yearns for.

Ain’t the Word of God amazin’!

(For Wednesday, May 24, 2017) **So where do your prayers go?**

“And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.” (Rev.6:8, ESV)

Now I know that “jolly old Elf” Santa has no basis in a Biblical understanding of The Incarnation. But come Christmas, I still spend an inordinate amount of time on the Hallmark Channel. And it has always tugged at my heart-strings that there are people every year who respond to letters written by wide-eyed children and addressed to “The North Pole.” So where do your prayers end up? Well, this verse from *Revelation* indicates that the prayers of the Saints are so dear to God that he keeps them close to his throne, rising up to him like incense. And, a little later on in the book, we find out that the purpose of at least some of those prayers – especially the ones for righteousness – is to bring about the final and perfect justice of his Reign. (See Rev.8:3-5)

How much time do you spend in earnest and regular prayer? Because that kind of plea finds its way straight to the throne-room of The Almighty.

(For Thursday, May 25, 2017 – The Ascension)

“While he [Jesus] blessed them he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.” (Lk.24:51-52, ESV)

When a young person moves away from home for the first time to pursue a job or an education, there is usually some trepidation on the part of the parents. However, I’ve noticed that if that same young person decides to enter a Godly marriage with another of strong Christian values, that departure usually brings a sense of joy and fulfillment to the parents. This difference between an emotion of trepidation and one of fulfillment is really what The Ascension is all about. Yes, with the Resurrection the victory has already been won, and death already defeated. But apparently, the Disciples have not yet realized the victory they have been given. The various accounts of The Last Supper – especially the one in John – depict a group of men who is extremely despondent at the news that The Lord is getting ready to leave them. But with The Ascension, the Disciples are so exuberant about Jesus’ departure into heaven that they *“returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.”* So, no more trepidation; only fulfillment

If the victory of The Resurrection is our assurance that we will “live happily ever-after,” the Ascension is the confirmation that this joyous living has now begun. Blessed Ascension Day.

(For Friday, May 26, 2017) **How much forgiveness do you owe?**

“Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” (Heb.2:17, ESV)

There are a few phrases that really get my goat. One of them is “I feel your pain.” Whenever I hear it, I cringe silently, but usually want to shout “No you don’t! You couldn’t possibly know what I’m feeling right now.” But, Jesus can actually say this with great accuracy. He’s intimately familiar with suffering, and so there’s really nothing this world can throw at us which is beyond the intense empathy of The Christ. In the temple in Jerusalem, the priests would offer sacrifices on behalf of the people. But Jesus offers himself as the perfect sacrifice (the “propitiation”) on our behalf. That means there is nothing so wicked, so awful, so hurtful in our past that’s too big for God to forgive, because no “badness” can ever rise to the level of goodness that Jesus offered up on the Cross for our sake.

Of course, when we realize all the really big things for which God has forgiven us, shouldn’t we be willing to provide a little of that same forgiveness to others?