

Sermon Feast of the Ascension Year C 2019

What is the human person for? What were we made for? What makes us and completes us? What is it that will fulfil the deepest longings of the human heart? Some will say that we are made for happiness. And while it is true that happiness is a great state to be in, it is difficult to maintain. And beyond a few rarefied occasions which hopefully do colour our lives (at least from time to time), happiness - deep, lasting, abiding happiness – remains elusive. And it is entirely dependent upon the accidentals of life: how I might be feeling (which of course changes from day to time, hour to hour if not minute to minute!!); and what might be going on around us, over which we have very little control indeed. Happiness proves an unhelpful goal for human life.

Others will say we are made for pleasure, that life is short and so we ought to squeeze as much out of life as possible: *eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die*. And again, we might hope that some of the pleasures of life do come our way; that we might be able to enjoy some modest comfort, good food and drink and the company of friends. We are not puritans, who have an aversion to the good things of this life. But as catholic Christians we celebrate that God indeed does give us good things and that they are to enjoy. But again, it makes a poor master. Once we have tried and tasted all the good things of life, what then? Once the 'bucket list' has been emptied, once we have seen the sights, enjoyed the thrills, experimented with every sort and variety of excitement and pleasure, what then? What after when it has all been tried and exhausted and the novelty and excitement wears off? The danger, of course, being that we have to constantly 'up the dose' to get our pleasure fix. A life of pleasure sounds grand, but really only leads to boredom, cynicism, and disappointment.

What, then are we for? What are we made for? In the Christian vision of things, we are made for God. *That* is our purpose. That is the key to our flourishing. It is in God that we will find out true and lasting fulfilment. In the Christian vision of things, the ultimate goal of human life is to love and serve God; that God has made us for himself to love and enjoy him for eternity. We believe that there is a God-given, unified structure to reality. Our task – the task of our lives, is to align ourselves with that God-given order. Our lives ring true when they oriented toward God. It's when we insist that human fulfilment can be found in other way by other means, we begin to get unstuck. We run into dead ends. And all the promises of this world ring hollow.

The issues and crisis that surround our sense of self-worth and purpose, the issues and crisis around our relationships, our sexual and political lives, the issue and crisis around education and the growing complexity of the ethical and moral dilemmas we face, all come from a failure to ask and address that essential question: what is the human person for? What are we made for?

This magnificent feast of the Ascension of the Lord which we celebrate tonight reminds us what we were made for. The liturgy firmly places before us the Christian answer to this key question. In the collect for this day we hear: *'that like as we do believe thy Only Begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended into the heavens; so we may also, in heart and mind thither ascend.'* We are to keep our lives – heart and mind – fixed on our ultimate destiny. Where Christ has gone, we are to follow. We are to order our lives to show where we are heading. And in the Preface for this day, *'who after his glorious resurrection manifestly appeared to his disciples; and in their sight ascended into heaven, to prepare a place for us; that where he is, thither might we also ascend, and reign with him in glory.'* The glory that has been bestowed upon Christ, we will we share! That is what we have been made for. That is our destiny. Amen.