

ZE06052601 - 2006-05-26

Permalink: <http://www.zenit.org/article-16136?l=english>

Father Cantalamessa on Our True Heaven

Pontifical Household Preacher on This Sunday's Gospel

ROME, MAY 26, 2006 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of a commentary by Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher to the Pontifical Household, on this Sunday's Gospel reading on the solemnity of the Ascension.

* * *

The Lord's Ascension

(Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23; Mark 16:15-20)

The solemnity of the Ascension of Jesus "to heaven" is an occasion to clarify once and for all our ideas on what we understand by "heaven." Among almost all peoples, heaven is identified with the dwelling of the divinity. The Bible also uses this spatial language. "Glory to God in the highest heaven and peace on earth to men."

With the advent of the scientific age, this religious meaning of the word "heaven" entered into crisis. For modern man, heaven is the space in which our planet moves and the whole solar system, and no more. We know the quip attributed to a Soviet astronaut, on his return from his trip through the cosmos: "I have traveled much through space and I haven't found God anywhere!"

So it is important that we try to clarify what we, Christians, understand when we say "Our Father, who art in heaven," or when we say that someone has "gone to heaven." On such things, the Bible adapts itself to popular speech: But it well knows and teaches that God "is in heaven, on earth and everywhere," that it is he who "has created the heavens," and if he has created them, he cannot be "closed" in them.

That God is "in the heavens" means that he "dwells in inaccessible light": that he is as far from us "as heaven rises over earth." In other words, that he is infinitely different from us. Heaven, in the religious sense, is more a state than a place. God is outside of space and time and so is his paradise.

In the light of what we have said, what does it mean to proclaim that Jesus "went up to heaven"? We find the answer in the Creed. "He went up to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father." That Christ went up to heaven means that "he is seated at the right hand of the Father, that is, that also as man he has entered God's world, who has been constituted, as St. Paul says in the second reading, Lord and head of everything. Jesus went up to heaven, but without leaving the earth. He has only gone out of our visual world. He himself assures us: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matthew 28:16-20).

The words of the angel -- "Galileans, why are you looking up to heaven?" -- therefore contain a warning, if not a veiled reproach. We must not stay looking up to heaven to discover where Christ is, but rather live awaiting his return, continuing his mission, taking his Gospel to the ends of the earth, improving the quality of life on earth.

ZENIT

As for us, "to go to heaven" or "to paradise" means to be "with Christ" (Philippians 1:20). "I am going to prepare a place for you ... so that where I am you may be also" (John 14:2-3).

"Heaven," understood as a place of rest, of eternal recompense of the good, was formed the moment Christ resurrected and went up to heaven. Our true heaven is the Risen Christ, whom we will go to meet and with him, be one "body" after our resurrection, and in a provisional and imperfect way immediately after death. Therefore, Jesus did not ascend to an already existing heaven that awaited him, but he went to form and inaugurate heaven for us.

There are those who ask: But what will we do "in heaven" with Christ for all eternity? Won't we be bored? I answer: Is it boring to be well and with excellent health? Ask those who are in love if they are bored being together. When one experiences a moment of very intense and pure joy, does not the desire arise that it last forever, that it never end? Down here such states do not last forever, because there is no object that can satisfy indefinitely.

It is different with God. Our minds will find the Truth in him and the Beauty that we will never cease to contemplate; and our hearts will find the Good that we will never tire to enjoy.

[Translation by ZENIT]

| [More](#)

© Innovative Media, Inc.

Reprinting ZENIT's articles requires written permission from the [editor](#).