

Easter 7B (5/24/09 – Kept)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

Those of you who could – and **did** – make the time on Thursday to celebrate *The Ascension of Our Lord* already heard about how our risen Savior disappeared from the sight of His disciples on that unnamed hill in Bethany and was hidden by the cloud ... how the angels of God told them: *Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, Who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.*” [ACTS 1.11] Our Lord Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven in His flesh – where He dwells forever at the right hand of the Father ... to intercede for us as our great High Priest [ROM 8.34; HEB 4.14]. And yet, since Christ ever remains also true God in that flesh, He forever abides with us here on earth ... **also** in His flesh – indeed, is omnipresent in all times and places, as the Scripture says: *“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”* (In saying, *“He ascended,”* what does it mean but that He had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He Who descended is the One Who also ascended far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.) [EPH 4.8-10]. And on the Last Day our Lord Jesus Christ will come like a flash of lightning ... in the wink of an eye ... suddenly ... to judge the living and the dead ... and to raise up to eternal life all who have slept in the death of faith ... those whose souls are in heaven, their bodies in the dust of the earth until that great and glorious return on the clouds.

Ever since *The Ascension of Our Lord*, the disciples of the Lord live in an “in-between” time, so to speak – the time in between His visible departure and His visible return. And that is the theme for the Holy Scripture readings appointed for this *Seventh Sunday of Easter* – as we prayed in the COLLECT: *O King of Glory, Lord of hosts, uplifted in triumph far above all heavens, leave us not without consolation but send us the Spirit of truth Whom You promised from the Father; for You live and reign with Him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.* We are in between Jesus’ Ascension and His Return. And just like the disciples of Jesus’ day, we need the gift of the Spirit of truth – the gift of the Holy Spirit Who leads us into the truth of the Word of God ... Who leads us into the truth of the Gospel of forgiveness in Jesus Christ and Him alone (apart from any merit or works on our part).

Whenever we find ourselves in the midst of trials and tribulations ... in the midst of sickness or the brokenness of our mortal bodies ... in the midst of our failings and sins ... or in the midst of great and momentous changes in life – even good and blessed changes, like graduations ... or marriage! – we need to know that we are *Kept* by God. We need to know that we are *Kept* by God **from** the eternal consequences of our **own** sins. We need to know that we are *Kept* by God **from**

the eternal consequences of sin in general; which is to say, that we are *Kept* by God **from** eternal death and eternal separation from God.

On the one hand, we need to know that we are *Kept* by God **for** the forgiveness of all our sins ... **in Christ**. We need to know that we are *Kept* by God **for** true life – abundant life – **in Christ** ... life that carries us through the valley of the shadow of death to the brightness of never-ending life before the glory of the Only and Triune God. We need to know that we are *Kept* by God **for** eternal salvation – not some fleeting façade of happiness and harmony ... but the everlasting saving of our souls ... that brings the blessed and certain hope of dwelling before the face of God forever in heaven ... that brings the blessed and certain peace of unity with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And yet, the reality in this life ever remains – nags and frustrates and provokes – that you are **kept** from doing what you ought to do ... what you as Christians would like to do. Your sinful flesh **keeps** you from doing the good that you would. Your sinful flesh **keeps** you doing the evil – the sin – that you are **not** to do ... that you so ardently wish **not** to do. Sometimes you act more like a Judas than a Peter, James, or John. You betray your Lord by your thoughts ... by your words ... by your deeds – or **lack** of them. You believe in your Lord Jesus Christ ... and in His work – His work alone – for your salvation; but your sinful flesh at times doubts like Thomas ... your sinful flesh keeps loving the things of the world more than Christ and causing you to act in a worldly way again and again. Your sinful flesh keeps you from regular meditation on the Word of God ... keeps pulling you away from your vocation as those sent into the world to be a light and a salt ... keeps your eyes focused on the temporary changes in this mortal life rather than the eternal changelessness of God and the promises He has given you ... keeps drawing you toward the evil one. And because of your sinful flesh – that *body of death* as St. Paul calls it [ROM 7.24] – that ever clings to you in this life, you keep on sinning ... even as Christians.

And so ... you need to *keep on* repenting **of** your sin. You need to *keep on* struggling **against** your sin. You need to *keep on* hearing about Christ's work – His life and death **because of** your sin ... His resurrection and ascension **in contradiction of** your sin (and **in opposition to** the death and eternal condemnation you deserve **for** your sin). You need to *keep on* receiving Christ's Word ... Christ's truth ... Christ's forgiveness ... Christ's peace ... and the unity of Father and Son (and Holy Spirit) – weekly in the gathering together of Christ's people ... and daily in meditation (where you speak to God in your prayers ... and God speaks to you in His Holy and unchanging Word).

But above all – and before all – simply receive ... simply believe ... *the*

*testimony of God that He has borne concerning His Son: that whoever believes in the Son of God ... whoever has the Son has life ... for God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son [1JN 5.9-11]. As Baptized children of God, you are Kept in Christ – you are Kept in repentance ... you are Kept in the faith ... you are Kept in righteousness and holiness ... clothed in Christ's righteousness and Kept in the Father's Name ... Kept in His mercy, forgiveness, love, salvation, and life.*

That's what the NAME of God means – mercy, forgiveness, love, salvation, and life ... even more. It is more than a mere title ... more than a word (or words) by which we may call on God and speak about Him – but it includes those. In the Old Testament, when God called Moses from the burning bush to send him to deliver His people from bondage in Egypt, Moses said: *If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is His Name?" what shall I say to them?* And the LORD God responded: *I AM WHO I AM. And He said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" And God spoke again to Moses: "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'YHWH the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My Name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations."* [EXO 3.14-15] The LORD God's Name, YHWH, is more than mere name ... more than title – His Name declares that He is the eternal God ... the Father–Creator of heaven and earth and all that there is ... the Son–Redeemer of all mankind from the beginning to the end of time ... the Holy Spirit–Comforter Who calls, gathers, sanctifies, and keeps believers in the one true faith unto life everlasting.

And throughout Scripture God uses more Names for Himself – Names that reveal not only Who He Is eternally, but what He is about ... what is important to Him ... what He has done for us sinners and for our eternal salvation. He calls Himself *Immanuel* – the God Who is with us in the flesh of His Son. He calls Himself *Jesus* – for He saves His people from their sins. He calls Himself *Paraclete* or *Counselor/Comforter* because – as we shall hear next week on *The Feast of Pentecost* – He *convicts the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment* [JN 16.8] ... all the time pointing us to Jesus Christ the Son of God, our Savior. He calls Himself *the Crucified One, Savior, Mediator, Advocate, High Priest* – for Christ our Lord has purchased and won us from all sin and unbelief ... and He ever intercedes for us as our great High Priest ... pleading His perfect life and the shedding of His holy, innocent Blood for our salvation.

By God's gracious work through His Word – and His “visible” Word ... the Word of promise attached to His Sacraments – you are *Kept* in the **Name** of God the eternal Father ... in the **Name** of Christ the eternal Son ... and in the **Name** of the eternal Holy Spirit of truth. By God's gracious work you are *Kept* in

forgiveness, life, and eternal salvation.

And now the true Body and Blood of our crucified yet risen and ascended Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will **keep** you steadfast in the true faith – in faith toward God and in fervent love toward one another – unto life everlasting.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]