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Solemnity of the Ascension B

This day the Church celebrates that day when the Lord Jesus was taken from our sight, to take His place at the right hand of God the Father. In one sense, this concludes the Gospel. There are two bookmarks, so to speak, in our Lady's life, from her Immaculate Conception to the Annunciation, and the Ascension until her Assumption and Coronation. Yet the Lord Jesus' life on earth begins with His conception and ends with His Ascension to God's right hand.

Although one chapter of history concludes, another begins. For this new chapter, the Lord gives His disciples instructions to follow. In the Gospel, we hear about all of these wonderful signs that the Lord Jesus told His apostles that would occur. We hear that His disciples will drive out demons. We hear that His disciples will speak new languages. We hear that His disciples will handle serpents with their hands, presumably without harm. We hear that if His disciples drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. Finally, we hear that His disciples will lay their hands on the sick, and the sick will recover. This is quite amazing, and yet we might wonder why all these things don't happen now.

First of all, we must understand what the Lord is talking about when He speaks of these things. He isn't just telling the disciples that they will perform miracles just to dazzle people. Take the handling of a serpent, for example. The point of handling a serpent isn't just to wow a crowd of people. The point is that the one handling the serpent need not be afraid of it. This goes back to the Garden of Eden, in which the serpent deceived Adam and Eve. The human race can now live free of the fear that comes with sin. That is but one example.

Some of these things do continue now. Some of His disciples do drive out demons. Some of His disciples do lay their hands on the sick in the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, and the sick recover. We know that the disciples did speak new languages, when the Holy Spirit descended upon them. We need not test God by seeing what will happen if we drink poison, or if we play with snakes.

Even if people today are not handling serpents or drinking poisons as the Apostles did, the point is still the same: we are no longer under the dominion of sin. In former times, this message needed to be confirmed by miraculous events, because the faith was just beginning to be spread and the Church was still in its infancy. These kinds of things were necessary to form the

Church early on. Now things are different. At this point, the Church's witness and its faith is enough to convince those who would come to the Lord.

The awe-inspiring power that led to the disciples performing signs is still part of the Church today. Which is more powerful: God driving out original sin in an infant who is baptized, or someone drinking poison and living? By far the greater manifestation of God's power is that He would drive out original sin. Original sin is a more powerful enemy than poison, because original sin destroys the soul while poison only destroys the body.

God's power is manifested in the sacraments. In every sacrament, God's power is present to drive out His enemies. Perhaps we don't see a dramatic result immediately, but God is present there. He is with us now, as He has always been. It is just that the Lord is present in a hidden way. When He overcomes His enemies, He does so in a hidden way.

However, this idea of handling serpents also helps us in our spiritual lives. Now that the Lord Jesus has ascended, He gives us His help from Heaven. The temptations that we must undergo: we no longer need fear them. We do not have to be afraid of evil in our lives and in our hearts. We know that the Lord Jesus has conquered death and all evil, and now that He ascends to Heaven, what is to prevent us from sharing in His victory and following Him?

Many saints have found a powerful way to overcome evil and the power of evil by having confidence in Christ's victory. They have confidence that God is loving and does not want to see His children fall into sin. They have confidence that the power of God's grace and the power of His sacraments can overcome any evil. They don't simply hope that it might overcome evil; they know that the power of God's will overcome anything.

Often times, evil can and will feed off of our fears. As we approach the altar today, we remember that the Lord Jesus has ascended into Heaven and taken His place at the Father's right hand. He did not abandon us to fend for ourselves. He continues to be with us, to be among us, and He gives us the strength that we need to overcome our temptations, our fears, or any evil that might beset us.

He also ascends to Heaven to show us what rewards await us when we share in His victory. He ascends to Heaven to prepare a place for us. The Lord Jesus has prepared a place for us and where He has gone, He has called us to follow. In Heaven, the Lord's glory will no longer be hidden, but will be clearly manifest to the saints and the angels.