



*Icon: My Heart and My Flesh Cry Out: O God, O Living God
Pastor's Office, Annunciation Rectory*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Risen and Ascended Lord,

Today, the Church observes the Ascension of the Lord into heavenly glory. Scriptures tells us that this wondrous event took place in the sight of the Eleven forty days after the Resurrection. Keeping track of the calendar would locate the Ascension on this past Thursday, May 21, 2020. For several years, for most of the United States and here in our archdiocese, the observance has been transferred to the Seventh Sunday of Easter, today.

Regardless of date, what does the Ascension of the Lord celebrate?

It means that Jesus Christ, sharing our humanity, born in our flesh, crucified, buried and risen in our flesh, has raised our humanity, our flesh, to heavenly glory. This is what we mean in the Creed when we say we look forward to the resurrection of the dead. In our flesh, we shall behold God. It means that when you and I enter eternity, we are not destined to forever be bodiless vapors or lingering thoughts in the minds of others, but we will be made whole – body and soul.

Ethically, what does that mean? What are the moral implications for life, right here and now, if I am to spend eternity (either in blessedness or damnation) in the flesh?

Let me reflect on our current practice of face masks. Some have observed that the continued wearing, or not, of face masks marks where we stand in political/cultural divides. I'M NOT GOING THERE IN THIS REFLECTION, if for no other reason than willful divisiveness is contrary to the Lord's will to gather humanity into one. No, I want to reflect upon two emotions I experience wearing a face mask.

First, I hate it. It's discomforting. It's disruptive; I can't tell you how many times I've headed out the door only to stop in my tracks because I forgot to put it on. My glasses are perpetually steamed up. It limits me. I don't like that. My ego doesn't like it. My ego wants to triumph over it. (Thank you, Sin of Adam, into which I was born, but washed clean in Baptism.)

Second, it reinforces a fear in me. It's protective, isn't it. From all those things lurking out there that would do me harm. If only I could withdraw, separate myself, from those harmful things...and persons. Blissful isolation! Until I remember that the mask-wearing, in an effort to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus to others, isn't to protect me from others, but to protect others from me. But that's what fear, especially excessive fear, does: it separates, isolates, alienates. The other is a threat, an enemy.

Oh, these masks of ours! How they alter the appearance of the image and likeness of God...in you, in me. They incite my ego; they make my fears more tangible. Such is our journey "in hac lacrimarum valle" as the Memorare Prayer phrases it: in this vale of tears.

Karl Rahner, the German Jesuit theologian, observed that the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven means that when you and I, by God's grace, get to heaven, a human face will be looking back at us. And that Gracious Face will hold all the faces of everyone we've loved, of everyone we should have loved but did not, and of everyone until that moment we haven't yet had the opportunity to love. It will be that long, loving look, into the depth of our being. And that look will call forth from us a perfection of love for one another; the ego must give way, fear no longer in play. All our masks, pulled away!

It will be, as our Catholic Tradition has always told us, The Beatific Vision!

I remain sincerely yours in the Risen and Ascended Christ,
Fr. Grogan