

This Great Mystery

Session 2. The Fullness of Him Who Fills All

Paul's most cosmic sentence lands in the last place anyone expected: on us.

What We Found

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians asks for nothing new. No protection, no success, no stuff. He prays for eyes: a spirit of wisdom and of revelation, the eyes of the heart enlightened, because everything has already been given and the task now is to see it. We also noticed that the possession may run both ways: we have an inheritance in God, and verse 18 hints that God counts his inheritance in the saints. He is our treasure; we are his.

We found Paul's open Bible. Made him sit at his right hand is Psalm 110:1, the coronation psalm of a king greater than David, sung for centuries at an empty throne. Put all things under his feet is Psalm 8:6, which is about mankind, crowned with glory and given the dominion Adam fumbled. Paul claims both at once: Jesus is the enthroned King, and Jesus is the true Man in whom our race's calling finally comes true.

And we traced the one long sentence of verses 15 to 23 to its landing point. After resurrection, enthronement, and every power subdued, it does not end on Christ alone. It ends: head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all. The ruler of the cosmos has been given to the Church. Whatever else she is, including your parish on an ordinary Sunday, she is not an audience. She is his body.

Voices of the Church

St. Augustine of Hippo, d. 430

Augustine returns again and again to what he calls the whole Christ, the totus Christus: Christ the head and the Church his body are so joined that they form, in a real sense, one Christ. When the Church prays the Psalms, he teaches in substance, it is Christ praying in his members; when the head was raised and enthroned, the body received its own destiny in him. Christ, having bound himself to us, does not will to be spoken of without his body.

Enarrationes in Psalmos (his expositions of the Psalms), a theme running throughout. Summary of St. Augustine of Hippo's teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For anyone who thinks of the Church as an optional extra bolted onto a personal Jesus, Augustine says gently: you have not yet met the whole Christ.

St. Leo the Great, d. 461

Preaching on the Ascension, Leo teaches in substance that Christ's going up was not a going away: what was visible of our Redeemer has passed over into the sacraments. The enthronement Paul describes in Ephesians 1:20 did not put Christ out of reach; it changed the mode of his presence, so that the King seated far above every power now reaches and feeds his body on earth through the mysteries the Church celebrates.

Sermons on the Ascension. Summary of St. Leo the Great's teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. The exalted Christ of this passage is not a distant Christ. The right hand of the Father and the parish altar are connected by his own design.

St. Joan of Arc, d. 1431

On trial for her life, pressed by her judges about her submission to the Church, the nineteen-year-old Joan answered, in substance, that about Jesus Christ and the Church she simply knew they were one thing, and that there was no need to make a difficulty of it.

Acts of her trial (1431), quoted at CCC 795. Summary of St. Joan of Arc's teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. A teenager facing execution compressed this whole passage into one sentence. For a generation told to like Jesus and distrust the Church, her answer refuses the split.

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Pray Ephesians 1:17-19 once a day this week for one person, by name, putting their name where the pronouns go. Do not add requests; pray only that they would see.
2. At Mass this Sunday, at the sign of peace or on the way back from Communion, look at the actual people around you and say silently: his body.
3. Write Psalm 110:1 on a card or a phone note and read it once a day. You now know why the apostles reached for that verse so often.

Scripture Memory

Ephesians 1:22-23

"and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all."

Ephesians 1:22-23

Ready Response

When a friend says: 'I'm into Jesus, just not the Church.'

Paul could not finish one sentence about the exalted Christ without landing on the Church: his body, the fulness of him (Ephesians 1:22-23).

A head does not go anywhere without its body.

St. Joan of Arc, on trial for her life, said in substance: about Jesus Christ and the Church, they are simply one thing.

Go Further in the Catechism

- CCC 669. Christ, as Lord, is head of the Church his Body
- CCC 792. Christ the head of this Body
- CCC 795. the whole Christ, head and members
- CCC 830. catholic: the fullness of Christ's body united with its head

Before next session. Read Ephesians 2:1-10 before we meet again.