

**Psalm 47 Daniel 7:13-14 Acts 1:1-11 St. Luke 24:49-53**

Power-filled People

The word dominion as used in our Old Testament reading for this Ascension Day taken from Daniel 7:13-14 is an interesting one when compared with its use in Genesis 1:26. There God said, "Let us make man in Our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." Pretty comprehensive dominion, don't you think? So what happened? As one looks at the world we live in today, one would not think that Mankind has much under control...many forces seem to overwhelm even our best attempts at peaceful and harmonious rule...and, in many ways, we seem set to destroy that which we were originally meant to care for.

The answer to the question 'what happened' is of course answered in Genesis chapter 3 where we learn about what theologians call the Fall. There our forebears chose to rebel against the One Who had not only given them life, but also Who had graciously granted them the authority to rule over His creation as His vice-regents. This act of defiance brought about what I call the Great Exile in which we were cast out of Paradise and effectively cut off from the Presence of the Creator and Sustainer of our lives. Therefore our task of exercising dominion was lost as we came under the dominion of the one we chose to obey instead of God, namely the devil himself...and sin kept us firmly in his claws...under his reign, our dominion took on an abusive and destructive character as we violated God's creation for our own ends.

But amazingly enough, our gracious God and King did not abandon us. Even as He spoke out the damning verdict in the Garden, He offered a promise that one day, He

would raise up a Seed of the woman to crush the rule of the serpent and to reverse the effects of our disobedience. This became the great hope for all God's people. Throughout the Old Testament we see believers straining to see the fulfillment of this promise. One such believer was Daniel, a young devout Jewish man who had been taken captive by Nebuchanezzar's army and carried off to Babylon. His vision of the reversal of the Fall was partially described in the lesson we read from this evening. "I was watching in the night visions," Daniel wrote, "and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! And He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed." In this vision, Daniel anticipated the restoration of all things at an Ascension as one like the Son of Man, as Daniel described Him, returned into Heaven to reign over that which had been given to Man at creation and lost by Man at the Fall.

Now, in the New Testament, this vision of Daniel's became a reality as Jesus, victorious over sin, death and the devil in His Crucifixion and resurrection, ascended into Paradise to be seated at God's right hand in a glorified yet bodily form to reign as a Man on behalf of Man. There He will remain until all His enemies have been brought into subjection to His sovereign rule. In other words, in Jesus Paradise lost is now Paradise regained, as Milton would say. The Early Church understood this to mean that when Jesus rose from the dead and was seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the age to come, that at that time all things were placed under His

feet and He was given to be Head over all things to the Church which is His Body, the fullness of Him Who fills all in all.

This indicates that the means by which Jesus reigns over His world is through us, His Church. All authority in Heaven and Earth has been given to Him, but He has chosen (as at the Creation) to delegate that authority to us in the New Creation as we see in His command for us to go into all His world to make disciples or followers of every nation. And what is this command other than an expanded form of the original command given to Adam and Eve in the Garden before the Fall? A command to exercise His dominion as His vice-regents over all creation. In other words, our Lord Jesus, in His incarnation, death and resurrection, established a beachhead, as it were, and in His Ascension He gave to us the mop-up operation for us to complete through the power of His Holy Spirit Who was poured out on us at Pentecost. This means that every Christian, by virtue of his or her allegiance to King Jesus, is engaged in a spiritual warfare in which we battle against the dominion of satan to push back the effect of the Fall...whether we like this idea or not. Now, of course, not all are engaged in warfare at the front lines...some may be operating very much in the background to ensure adequate supplies make it through to those who are on the battle-field...but all are nonetheless engaged in the struggle to take back that which is rightfully our Lord's.

This battle is, of course, not essentially a physical one, but a spiritual one. St. Paul said that we do not war against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers of darkness in the heavenly places. Therefore our weapons are not physical either...we wield the weapons of prayer and of the truth proclaimed in His Word...and it is as we advance throughout the world using these weapons, starting in our own home-town and

moving steadily forward and onward to the very ends of the earth, that we will lead people out from under the dominion of satan, sin and death into the liberty of the dominion of Jesus...and thereby conquer all for our King.

However, having said that, we must remember that although the battle is primarily of a spiritual nature, the victory does include the original mandate...to exercise dominion over all creation. And creation itself, according to St. Paul, is released from bondage to misrule and abuse as the followers of the reigning God-Man Jesus and revealed and as they learn to care for what God has entrusted to us. It is important to note in the Gospels that Jesus did not only care for souls, but also for bodies. This is God's creation and He gave the dominion over it to us, the Church, members of His renewed and redeemed humanity. We therefore should follow His example in doing what is right for our environment...by doing what will promote the original goodness of creation...and we should most certainly not abdicate our responsibility simply because the so-called liberals got to do it first. Rather we ought to repent of our waywardness and neglect and get on with doing what we were created and, indeed, recreated, to do.

Dearest beloved brethren, the Eucharist teaches us that our Lord was successful in fulfilling the promise made by God to Mankind at the Fall. Here we remember that He rose victorious over death and the devil and that He paid the penalty for sin on our behalf. But here we are also taught that He now is seated as King at the right hand of God the Father, and that He has sent us His Holy Spirit to empower us to recapture in His Name and through His strength that which was once lost through Adam's disobedience. So as you come to partake of the symbols of His victory, ask Him to give you your marching

orders, as it were, so that you may leave from His presence tonight with a renewed sense of your calling to exercise dominion over all the earth as His vice-regents.

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