

Dominion Churchman.

THURSDAY, MAY 18, 1876.

THE ASCENSION.

We arrive now at the consideration of the last event in connection with our Saviour's ministry. His ascension not only into Heaven, but His elevation far above all the Heavens where created glory dwells, even to the topmost seat and eminence of uncreated splendor, the throne of Almighty God Himself. The fortieth day after the Resurrection has been observed as one of the great church festivals from the beginning of Christianity, although now so strangely neglected by multitudes of those who would have us think of them as good Christians. We commemorate the birth of Immanuel, the sacrifice of Messiah, and the resurrection of our triumphant Head, with something of an appreciation of their great importance to the principles of our Faith; but as though overpowered with the grandeur of the scene, we are not anxious to follow on to the place of the Redeemer's glory, but lose sight of Him as the disciples did, when a cloud received Him from their sight.

The three Rogation days form a suitable preparation for commemorating so great an event. Proper Psalms and Lessons are appointed for the day. Ps. viii. is a song of praise for creation, and the appointment of man to be Lord of this world. In a prophetic sense, it sets forth the mercy of God in exalting our human nature above all other creatures, which was fulfilled when the Son of God took our nature, and ascended with it far above all heavens. Ps. xv. shows how justly the Saviour, as the perfect pattern man, ascended to the holy hill of God, and thus points out the qualifications which we must endeavor to attain, if we would follow Him there. Ps. xxi. was eminently fulfilled in the Lord's victory over death, and in His ascension, when, having put all his enemies to flight, He was exalted in His own strength. Ps. xxiv. was composed by David on the occasion of bringing the ark into the place he had prepared for it on Mount Zion. It has always been understood to be prophetic of the exaltation of Christ, the King of Glory, who passed through the everlasting doors, when He went back to His own original glory in the Heavens. Ps. xlvii. is also a song of praise for the victories of Israel over the surrounding nations, and is applied to the Christian Church, whose Head and Lord is the great King upon all the earth, and has gone up with a merry noise; and Ps. viii. calls upon us to give thanks to God that He has set Himself above the Heavens, and is the Lord both of Jews and heathens. The first Lessons relate to the giving of the Law to Moses in the mount, regarded as a type of our Saviour's ascension into heaven to send down the new law of faith; and also the assumption of Elijah,

and the consequent communication of a double portion of His spirit to Elisha, which prefigured our Saviour who after His ascension sent down the Holy Ghost upon His apostles.

The New Testament account of the Ascension closes with the interposition of the cloud, which stopped the earnest gaze of the disciples, while they listened to the voices from the skies which exclaimed: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." But the sixty-eighth Psalm, uttering the language of prophecy, furnishes some particulars not found in the Gospel history. We use this Psalm on Whitsunday, because it alludes to the results of the Ascension. The disciples saw what was transacted on this side of the cloud. The Psalmist, imbued with the spirit of prophecy, saw what was transacted beyond it, and he has expressed it in emphatic language: "Thou hast ascended to the lofty seat (of Jehovah); thou hast carried captive the captives." The allusion is to the ancient practice of military triumphs. A province in an empire is in a state of rebellion. A commander is sent to reduce it to subjection. He succeeds and takes the heads of the revolted prisoners. He fastens them to his chariot wheels as he returns to the metropolis of the empire, and receives gifts which he distributes among his followers. Applying this to the Ascension, the world is the province in rebellion against the majesty of heaven. The fallen spirits were the leaders of the rebellion, brought into captivity by Jesus Christ. He went alone without the camp to contest the battle in Gethsemane and on Calvary, and took the most singular as well as the most successful means of making the victory His own. He conquered the might of Satan by seeming weakness; and gained the victory by submitting to apparent defeat, and surrendering His own life. Through death He deposed him that had the power of death. Then when He bowed His head and gave up the ghost, he acquired the power to break the yoke from the neck of those who should join His Church. When He rose from the dead His victory was seen to be complete. All power in heaven and earth was given to Him in His human nature; and His work on earth being finished, He returned to the home He had left. He ascended up on high (to the lofty seat of Jehovah). He carried captive the captives, and received gifts for men, which have been conferred on His church to the present time. Spoiling principalities and powers, He triumphed over them openly, making a show of them.

The results of Christ's ascension and its influence on the Church appear to be but little dwelt upon considering their vast importance. The most direct and immediate consequence of the elevation of

Messiah to the throne of the universe was to change His local presence for the universal presence of the man Christ Jesus. He ascended up far above all heavens that He might fill all things. We know that the body of Jesus Christ, between the resurrection and the ascension, possessed properties widely different from those it had before the crucifixion, being invested with some of the qualities we are accustomed to attribute to pure spirit; and this passage would cause us to believe that after the assumption, the human nature of our blessed Lord is to be viewed as having in some mysterious way, the characteristics of Divinity assigned to it. While He was on earth but few of the inhabitants of our world could see Him, and only a very small number could have intercourse and fellowship with the Saviour of men. But now that He has gone up on high, He is present with His people everywhere; now we hold communion with His glorified humanity in all parts of the world, and through all time.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is also one of the great gifts imparted immediately after the Ascension—that most precious gift—which will be continued to the Church, as a body, and to individual Christians until Messiah shall come again in His glory. With the possession of this ample treasure, the Church may look through the darkest clouds to the consummation of the Church's glory, when "the tabernacle of God shall be with men," and when "the city shall have no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God shall lighten it, and the Lamb shall be the light thereof. But without the constant presence of the Divine Spirit, the Church would at once languish, fade away and die.

The gift of the Word is also one of the results of the ascension. For the Divine Redeemer promised to bring all things to the remembrance of the apostles, whatsoever He had spoken to them. Nor is the gift of the ministry one of the smallest or least important of those treasures communicated to the Church in consequence of the event we commemorate on Holy Thursday. This treasure is in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God. But we must remember that it was when He had ascended on high that He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

Thus important are the results of the ascension of Christ, and the Church has very properly made its commemoration one of her principal festivals.

THE ROGATION DAYS.

Rogation Sunday is so called because it precedes the three Rogation days, days of supplication and prayer, accompanied with processions. The Greeks