I picture Jesus returning to the Father in Heaven, saying, “Father, Mission Accomplished” and then saying, “Father, let us breathe forth our Holy Spirit upon the world through my risen and Glorified body” (Scott Hahn).

One lesson we clearly glean from our Lord’s Ascension is that the entire trajectory of Jesus’ earthly life was Heaven. He, Jesus, is the first born of many brethren (Romans 8:29). Therefore, the absolute true meaning of life is Heaven. Saint Paul says it beautifully: “Our citizenship is in Heaven” (Philippians 3:20). To truly understand the meaning of life we must get this principle straight. Take a look at your Passport: I hope it says “Citizen of Heaven.” Heaven is your true home. We are pilgrims here on planet earth.

Another lesson we glean initially from our Lord’s Resurrection, and ultimately from his Ascension, is the incredibly profound meaning of the ultimate destiny of the human body. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church we read the following very significant words: “The Father’s power ‘raised up’ Christ his Son and by doing so perfectly introduced his Son’s humanity, including his body, into the Trinity. Jesus is conclusively revealed as ‘Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his Resurrection from the dead’” (CCC 648). “Christ’s Ascension marks the definitive entrance of Jesus’ humanity into God’s heavenly domain, whence he will come again…” (CCC 665).
Consequently, any claim that Christianity devalues the body or human nature is misguided. Pope Benedict XVI, in a homily in 2005, stated: “Christ’s Ascension means – that He belongs entirely to God. He, the Eternal Son, led our human existence into God’s presence, taking with Him flesh and blood in a transfigured form. The human being finds room in God; through Christ, the human being was introduced into the very life of God.” C.S. Lewis adds:

“Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses.”

Christ’s Ascension also signifies the beginning of the final hour of human history. By Christ’s Ascension into Heaven the final age – indeed the final “hour” – of the world has begun. The Catechism states: “Since the Ascension God’s plan has entered into its fulfilment. We are already at ‘the last hour’.

‘Already the final age of the world is with us, and the renewal of the world is irrevocably under way; it is even now anticipated in a certain real way, for the Church on earth is endowed already with a sanctity that is real but imperfect’ ” (CCC 670). All Christians are living in “end times,” which means that we should be diligently preparing for the return of the Lord who is already present to us through the Holy Eucharist.

Finally, our Lord’s Ascension shows that He is the King and High Priest of all creation. There are powerful words in the Epistle to the Hebrews about Jesus’ ongoing priestly ministry in Heaven (words that should really give us great encouragement!). In the seventh chapter of Hebrews we read: “... because Jesus lives forever [in Heaven], he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (Hebrews 7:24-25; CCC 519). Is it not incredibly encouraging to know that Jesus is always living to make intercession for you! Does not that revelation of his incessant intercession for you fill your heart with confidence!
Moreover, the author of Hebrews identifies Jesus’ never-ending priesthood in Heaven as the true fulfilment of the Order of Melchizedek, the very first priesthood mentioned in the Old Testament (see Genesis 14). In fact, the Order of Melchizedek is mentioned multiple times in Hebrews! This is a very significant point for Catholics because the “thanksgiving offering” made by the priest Melchizedek in the Old Testament was that of bread and wine (Genesis 14:18), which constituted a “communion sacrifice” per Dr. Scott Hahn.

Jesus is identified in Hebrews as “the mediator of a new covenant” (Hebrews 12:24). The true sacramental sign of this New Covenant is identified by Jesus as the Holy Eucharist (“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” – Luke 22:20). As such we are advised in Hebrews not to neglect ‘to meet together” for the New Testament liturgy (Hebrews 10:25), the Mass, of our High Priest, Jesus Christ (see CCC 692). Jesus ascended into Heaven is the true High Priest at every Mass.

The Apostles are commissioned to spread - to the whole world, to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem - at the first Ascension. It’s the good news we must spread today. Jesus now appoints the disciples as his witnesses. They have seen his death and can now testify to his resurrection (Marshall, 906). They are to spread the good news of repentance and forgiveness of sins, to all the nations, beginning with Jerusalem (Lk. 24:47).

He clothes them with power. They are not being asked to be “flame among the stubble” on their own power, but with the aid of the Holy Spirit. They are to wait in Jerusalem until they are “clothed with power from on high” (24:49). (Relevant O.T. texts are Joel 2:28f; Is. 32:15, 44:3; and Ezek. 39:29; see also Lk. 12:12; Mt. 10:20; and Jn. 14:16f.)

The present account of Jesus’ ascension (Lk. 24:50-51) is not of a different event from the ascension recorded in Acts 1:2, 4-11. It is simply a shorter version of it. Luke makes the departure of Jesus both the climax of the Gospel and the commencement of the Acts of the Apostles. The stress is on Jesus’ priestly action in blessing the disciples and on their praise to
God in the temple.

Luke has shown us the joy that came when the disciples recognized Jesus (24:41). He has shown us Jesus’ assurance to his friends that, though he is leaving, they will never be without him. Why would they not want to savour this moment, while tasting the salt of their tears? What is there to keep joy from overcoming their sorrow? What is to keep them from returning to Jerusalem with great joy and praising God in the temple?

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