

## Ascension of the Lord

by Blessed Andrew, Archbishop of Novo Diveyevo

**“While He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy”...with great joy ... “and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God” (Lk. 24:51-3).**

If, during the course of six weeks, the Holy Church has been teaching us to preserve this peace which Christ granted on the first day of His Resurrection, saying: “Peace be unto you” (Jn. 20:19), then now this feeling of peace should fill our hearts. You see, this feeling of peace appears in all of us as an expectation of joy. People search for some kind of rest, some kind of comfort.

For this they travel from place to place in order to find peace. And yet this peace is within them, only in an unrevealed state. Peace is that gift which the Lord gave to us, that peace which keeps a person in a kind of unearthly state of joy. This is what the Holy Church has been teaching us during the six weeks of Easter: to be close to Christ, to preserve this peace, protect ourselves from those things which, entering our heart, might disturb this peace. You see, our heart is the place in which peace abides.

And this peace abides in the heart as long as nothing burning approaches the heart. But as soon as something Burning (some kind of passion) approaches the heart — then at once peace leaves and a storm begins. This storm thrashes all our hearts. This storm is the element of the enemy of the human race, troubling all of humanity. May this storm pass by those who are in the shelters of Christ.

And what are these shelters of Christ? these refuges for human souls from the storms of life? This is what they are. On the evening of the first day of His Resurrection, when the doors of the house where His disciples were gathered were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them: “Peace be unto you!” This is His first gift, as it were, the first shelter, which through His disciples He gave to all of us Christians.

“And when He had so said, He showed unto them His hands [and feet] and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit: Whose so ever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven; and whose so ever sins ye retain, they are retained” (Jn. 20:20-23).

Here is the second gift, the second shelter. And now, when Christ ascends, He leaves us the Grace of the Holy Spirit which He promised on the very first day of His Resurrection. He leaves two gifts for us. The first gift is the peace which all people search for — true happiness. And the second gift, as if protecting and preserving this peace, is the Sacrament of Repentance, the gift of the Holy Spirit given to His disciples — the gift of the remission of sins.

And here today, while parting from the disciples and ascending into heaven, He blessed them. And what happened? There was a parting. Now parting always brings sadness, but they

left in joy. Why? Well, because before them were revealed the ways of life, which were no longer self-reliant, but were with the Grace of God. They knew that they too would go into eternity to Christ. And while living in this earthly life, which is so bound up with the storms of life, the path they were going would be quiet and peaceful for them, because the Grace of the Holy Spirit is breathed into the priesthood, forgiving and absolving.

And what does the Apostle say in this regard? Here is what he says: “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, Who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness.. .covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:3-5). In other words, you proceed and around you pass all these waves: impurity, anger, fury, slander. Your heart is tossed from one side to the other. Yet you are joyful. Around you is the Hand of the Lord, the Grace of the Holy Spirit which guides and comforts you, giving light, freeing you from darkness and anguish. This is joy. The joy is that we are liberated. We have that inner joy which only a Christian can have, who has the Hand of God, the hand of Grace, absolving us of our sins. And we know that finding ourselves on this path of Grace, we go enlightened into Eternal Existence.