

The Ascension: a Beginning, Not an Ending *By*
Fr Lawrence Farley

If one read the four Gospels as if they were four separate biographies of Jesus, one might be forgiven for thinking that the Ascension narrated the end of the story. We have read narratives of Christ's birth, His baptism, His temptation in the wilderness, His ministry, His crucifixion, His resurrection, and now at the last we come the narrative of His ascension, concluding the story of His life with a heavenly happy ending. Everyone loves a happy ending, and this one rounds out the story of Jesus by saying in effect, "And He lived happily ever after at the right hand of God." In this way of thinking, the story is not finished without the Ascension.

It might therefore come as a surprise to learn that three out of the four canonical Gospels do not end with the Ascension or even narrate it at all. Matthew's Gospel ends not with Christ ascending from us, but with His remaining with us, uttering the words, "Behold, I am with you always, even to the close of the age" [Matthew 28:20]. The authentic ending of Mark's Gospel ends with the discovery of the empty tomb (the last part of Christ's public ministry, just as His baptism was the first part), and with the words that the women "fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" [Mark 16:8]. John's Gospel ends with a third appearance of the risen Christ to His disciples by the Sea of Tiberias (scholars debate about whether or not it first ended with the earlier appearance to Thomas) and with John's observation that if everything Jesus had done were to be written up, the world itself could not contain those books. John clearly knew about the ascension, for he records Christ's words to Mary Magdalene, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father" [John 20:17], but he does not narrate that ascension any more than Matthew does or Mark does. Only Luke narrates the ascension, adding almost as an afterthought that "while He was blessing them, He went away from them and was carried up into heaven" [Luke 24:51], the ascension event itself expressed in a mere five words in the Greek. Luke narrates it at somewhat greater length in his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, saying with a similar economy of words, "while they were looking, He was taken up and a cloud received Him from their eyes" [Acts 1:9] — the event expressed in nine Greek words. What does all this mean?

For one thing it means that the Gospels are not biographies as we understand the term. But more importantly it reveals that the ascension was not the *ending* of a story, but the *beginning* of one, not the conclusion of

Christ's life so much as the beginning of the life of the Church. It is no coincidence that the Evangelist who narrated the ascension also narrated at great length and repeatedly the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, so that Luke is the Evangelist of the Holy Spirit as well as the Evangelist of the Ascension. The two events are connected, for one is the cause of the other. Christ foretold it during His last night with His disciples prior to His arrest: "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you" [John 16:7]. Luke narrated the fulfillment in the words of Peter's Pentecostal sermon: "Being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which you both see and hear" [Acts 2:33].

The temptation is to regard the Holy Ascension as if it were the Holy Absence, as if Christ has gone away and we now have less of His presence than was available when He walked the earth. It is not so. While He walked the earth, the apostles could be with Him, but this nearness was conditioned by time and space, and there were times when they were not with Him. When He was not physically in Judea, for example, Mary and Martha could not be with Him. Now that He has been exalted to the Father's right hand and has sent His Spirit, we can be near Him always, for His presence is no longer conditioned by time and space. Everyone can now be close to Jesus and by the power of the Spirit can be with Him every waking hour and even every sleeping hour. The ascension and the sending of the Spirit means that we now have more of Jesus, not less of Him. That is why the Lord said at the end of Matthew's Gospel that He would be with us until the close of age. These words were not a denial of a future ascension, but a promise of it. The challenge for us now is to live as children of the ascension, and as children of the Spirit. Our Lord's presence and power are always available to us. The question is: how often do we avail ourselves of them?

**125th ANNIVERSARY OF ORTHODOXY IN
CHICAGO (1892-2017) EVENTS**

Saturday, September 30, 2017

10:00 am: Pan Orthodox Hierarchical Divine Liturgy with many Orthodox Bishops @ Lane Tech Auditorium. (Western & Addison Streets- Chicago)
Guest Homilist: + Rt. Rev. Irinel (Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Eastern United States)

3:00 pm: Testimonial Banquet @ St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Cultural Center (Winona @ Foster Ave- Chicago). Honoring with Gratitude His Eminence Metropolitan Iakovos (Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago).

Further info forthcoming over the next few weeks.

New Answers from the Bible Answer Man

by Matushka Valerie Zahirsky

Hank Hanegraaff is well-known as the “Bible Answer Man.” His recent conversion from Protestantism to Orthodoxy has caused comments across a wide spectrum of opinion. Some people have welcomed him home to the true Orthodox faith. Others say he has forfeited his soul by abandoning the faith of the Bible.

The format of his “Bible Answer Man” blogs includes questions and answers. People write in with questions about the Bible, and he responds. So I imagined someone writing in with this question: Why is God never mentioned in the Book of Esther?

Here is one expression of the widely held idea that in the Book of Esther God’s name never appears. In his book *All the Men of the Bible/All the Women of the Bible* [Zondervan 1996] Herbert Lockyer writes, “A peculiar feature of the Book of Esther is that, with the Song of Solomon, it shares the distinction of not mentioning God or any divine name once throughout its pages.” As a former Protestant, it’s likely that Hank Hanegraaff accepted this idea as true.

But those of us whose version of the Bible is the Septuagint, rather than the present-day Hebrew Bible on which the King James Version is based, know that this idea is seriously mistaken. All Bible versions present Esther as the woman who saved her people by winning the favor of the Persian king and dissuading him from destroying the Hebrews. But her prayers, recorded only in the Septuagint, reveal how much the effort cost her.

Esther addresses God: “You know all things, and You know I hate the glory of the lawless and abhor the bed of the uncircumcised and of every foreigner. You know my necessity, for I abhor the symbol of my proud station which is upon my head in the days when I appear in public, as if it were a menstrual rag, and I do not wear it on the days I am alone.” She goes on: “Your handmaid has not eaten at the table of Haman, nor have I honored the banquet of the king, nor drunk the wine of libations. Neither has Your handmaid rejoiced since the day of her elevation, except in You, O Lord, God of Abraham. O God, Who have power over all, hear the voice of us in despair, and deliver us from the hand of those acting wickedly, and deliver me from my fear.”

So, how would Hank Hanegraaff answer that hypothetical question about the Book of Esther never mentioning God? Let’s hope he would share the incredible richness of the young woman’s prayers. Esther, like so many believers today, lived among people hostile to her faith and far more powerful than she was. She felt fear, and she

hated having to do some of the things she did in public to keep herself and her people from destruction. Through it all, she steadfastly honored God, trusting and relying completely on Him.

What a gift to readers of the Old Testament if the Bible Answer Man will share this deeper understanding of Esther with people who were unaware of it before. What a gift to all of us is this lovely young woman, determined even in a life-and-death situation to be faithful to the One True God.



31ST ANNUAL CHICAGO DEANERY SUMMER YOUTH CAMP

Ages: 12-18 / July 5-9

(Edwards YMCA Camp, East Troy, Wisconsin)

- Friendship w/ other Orthodox Christian Youth
 - Prayer
 - Religious education in an informal setting
 - Campfires
 - sports and games
 - Archery
 - freshwater lake swimming.
 - Canoes
 - Kayaks
 - Banana Boat
 - Tube slide
 - Nature study & hikes
 - Tower climbing
 - Team building
 - Ropes course
 - Field trip
- And more

All-Inclusive cost is just
\$160 per camper
Register by June 30
A Completed registration
form is required. Please see
Flier on bulletin board or
contact Fr. Andrew. There
will be assistance if needed.

SAVE THE DATE: HOLY TRINITY CATHEDRAL TO CELEBRATE 125 YEARS

Saturday June 10:

2:00pm- Cathedral Tour

4:00pm- Vigil (refreshments to follow)

Sunday, June 11:

9:00am- Hierarchical Divine Liturgy (refreshments to follow)

12:30pm- Optional Bus Transport

2:00pm- Cocktails & Banquet, The Carlisle, Lombard, IL

Visit: www.tinyurl.com/htc125 for info on tickets, hotel discounts, etc. Contact margo.pelak@gmail.com with questions.

LIGHTS OUT

One hundred years on and still the shout
"Everyone put your lights out"
Just for an hour from 10 to 11
And remember all those souls in heaven

One hundred years and still the cry
The perennial unanswered question "why?"
Is there a need in this hour of deed
For any to ignore or not to heed?

One hundred years, millions dead
In battles, wars and streets of dread
Trenches then, now car bombs blast
Tearing at families left aghast

One hundred years – again LIGHTS OUT
Not one city but the country throughout
Is this too much to ask ourselves
For those who died through bayonet and shells?

Lights out and let us honour our dead
Light a single candle in room or shed
Remember those terse words upon us yet
"Lest we Forget – lest we forget!"

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https://www.poetrysoup.com/poems/best/memorial_day

Casualties in War

Civil War: Approximately 620,000 Americans died. The Union lost almost 365,000 troops and the Confederacy about 260,000. More than half of these deaths were caused by disease.

World War I: 116,516 Americans died, more than half from disease.

World War II: 405,399 Americans died.

Korean War: 36,574 Americans died.

Vietnam Conflict: 58,220 Americans died. More than 47,000 Americans were killed in action and nearly 11,000 died of other causes.

Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm: 148 U.S. battle deaths and 145 non-battle deaths.

Operation Iraqi Freedom: 4,422 U.S. service members died.

Operation New Dawn: 66 U.S. service members died.

Operation Enduring Freedom: 2,318 U.S. service members have died as of May 12, 2014.



In the End, we will remember
not the words of our enemies,
but the silence of our friends.

Martin Luther King, Jr



Memorial Day was a response to the unprecedented carnage of the Civil War, in which some 620,000 soldiers on both sides died. The loss of life and its effect on communities throughout the country led to spontaneous commemorations of the dead:

- In 1864, women from Boalsburg, Pa., put flowers on the graves of their dead from the just-fought Battle of Gettysburg.
- In April 1866, in Carbondale, Ill., 219 Civil War veterans marched through town in memory of the fallen to Woodlawn Cemetery, where Union hero Maj. Gen. John A. Logan delivered the principal address. The ceremony gave Carbondale its claim to the first organized, community-wide Memorial Day observance.
- Waterloo, N.Y. began holding an annual community service on May 5, 1866. Although many towns claimed the title, it was Waterloo that won congressional recognition as the "birthplace of Memorial Day."
- Gen. Logan, the speaker at the Carbondale gathering, also was commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of Union veterans. On May 5, 1868, he issued General Orders No. 11, which set aside May 30, 1868 "for the purpose of strewing with flowers, or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion." The orders expressed hope that the observance would be "kept up from year to year while a survivor of the war remains to honor the memory of his departed comrades."
- On May 30, 1868, President Ulysses S. Grant presided over the first Memorial Day ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery—which, until 1864, was Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's plantation. Some 5,000 people attended on a spring day which, The New York Times reported, was "somewhat too warm for comfort." The principal speaker was James A. Garfield, a Civil War general, Republican congressman from Ohio and future president. "I am oppressed with a sense of the impropriety of uttering words on this occasion," Garfield began, and then continued to utter them. "If silence is ever golden, it must be beside the graves of fifteen-thousand men, whose lives were more significant than speech, and whose death was a poem the music of which can never be sung."

The life of St. Mardarije of Libertyville (1889-1935)

Born in village of Kornet, Ljesani County, in Montenegro, on November 2, 1889, to pious parents Petar and Jela Uskokovic, he was baptized in his village church dedicated to St. George and received his baptismal name Ivan. His mother was from the well known Bozovic family. Both of his parents were well respected in their community holding the office of leadership and particularly his father was a captain of their clan.



Considering his parents' status, young Ivan was sent to further his education, first in Rijeka Crnojevic, Cetinje, and then in Belgrade, Serbia. While in Belgrade, young Ivan advanced his childhood desire to serve God and the Church, and so from there he headed to monastery Studenica where after a short period of novice life he gets tonsured to monasticism having received the name Mardarije. With the decision of the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, now young hierodeacon Mardarije is sent to Russia where he spent twelve years (1905-1917) furthering his theological education and growing in wisdom. From there, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church sent him to the United States of America to organize the Serbian Orthodox Church. On December 1, 1923, now archimandrite Mardarije is appointed as administrator of the Serbian American-Canadian diocese with the see in Chicago and that same year he purchased around ten acres of land in Libertyville, Illinois, where later St. Sava monastery was built. He was elected by the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church as the first bishop for the newly established diocese in America on December 7, 1925, and his consecration took place on Palm Sunday, the Feast of the Entrance of Our Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem, on April 25, 1926.

From then on His Grace Bishop Mardarije, the first bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America, labored tirelessly in building churches, St. Sava monastery in Libertyville, sowing Christian love, spread peace, preached and witnessed the Gospel of Christ throughout his diocese. In spite of inescapable worldly trends, he lived spontaneity of truth and a provision of grace, just because Life has dawned from the Tomb, and is dawning still. Having labored as bishop for a little over nine years he died peacefully on December 12, 1935, hospitalized in Ann Arbor, Michigan, while writing his last Nativity Encyclical to his beloved

Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church during its regular session held from May 14-29, 2015 brought forth a decision that his name be added to the Diptych of saints of the Holy Orthodox Church.

From the Holy Hierarch Mardarije, we see how the grace of God reaches the heart of our cities, bringing to the confusion of the world the breeze of the Spirit and the serenity of the Age to come.

Troparion of Sts. Mardarije and Sebastian:

O God of our Fathers, Always act with kindness towards us; Take not Your mercy from us, But through the prayers of Saints Mardarije and Sebastian Guide our lives in peace.

Kontakion to St. Mardarije of Libertyville, Tone 8:

Tireless preacher of Christ the Lord, Leader on the path of St. Sava for your people in diaspora, Labor-loving practitioner and teacher of repentance, Holy Mardarije of Libertyville and America, Together with all the Enlighteners of the American lands, Entreat the only Lover of Mankind, To grant all Orthodox Christians peace and unity!



Icon of St. Sebastian & St. Mardarije



St. Mardarije of Libertyville

Incorrupt relics of St. Mardarije

