The glorious ascension of the Lord (Archimandrite Vassilios Bakoyiannis)

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Precisely when did this event occur? ”No one has precisely told us everything about this period (the Ascension of the Lord)” (St John Chrysostom P.G. 60: 18). Eusebius of Caesarea informs us that the Ascension was celebrated in his time (4th century) together with the festival of Pentecost (P.G. 20: 1220). A consequence of this practice is Canon XX of the 1st Oecumenical Council that prohibits kneeling during the entire period of Pentecost, since it is a period of resurrection.

The Ascension as an event was very impressive. The hymn writer refers to the Ascension as the “*the awe-inspiring moment of elevation*” (Pentecostarion. Matins of the feast of the Ascension). Let us just imagine Christ standing on the hill of the Olive trees surrounded by his disciples and other people and His Body slowly rising (of its own volition) high into the sky. This was the last miracle that Christ performed on earth. And it was the first time that His human nature entered heaven, the throne of God!

Christ’s mission was to descent to earth and become human, in order to save us through His death by Crucifixion. And upon the completion of His mission, “the fulfilment of providence on our behalf”, he returned to His “base”, “where He previously was” (Vespers at the festival of the Ascension).

He descended in one form and ascended in another form. He descended as God and ascended as God and Man. The Angels asked the Lord, as they saw Him ascending into heaven: “*Why are Your garments red (painted with blood) as one who treads in a winepress?*” (Isaiah 63: 2. *“I am full of the treading of grapes, and there is no man among the nations. I trampled them in My anger, and crushed them like earth, and brought down their blood to the ground”* (the devil, sin and death)” (Isaiah 63: 3). And the angels exclaimed: “*Lift up the gates, O you rulers, And be lifted up, you everlasting doors, And the King of glory shall enter*”. (Psalm 23: 9), And they then asked: “*Who is this King of Glory?”* to which they responded: *“The Lord of hosts. He is the King of glory*” (Ps. 23:10).

It is “logical” that since He had now completed His mission that He would “discard” His human nature and ascend to Heaven in the manner that He had descended, but He did not do this! Because He wanted to continue to labour for our sake by mediating as a man for our salvation, *“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim. 2: 5). Just as Christ prayed on

earth, as a man for His disciples , so that they may have love amongst themselves, (Jn 17: 20-21) so too, he now prays to His Father for His Priests, High Priests, the Church, and continues to “offer” Himself through the Holy Eucharist for the salvation of the world, and will continue to do so until the end of times. AMEN.