

A Homily for Ascension Thursday, May 1, 2008  
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If a child asks you, “After Jesus said goodbye did he go up to heaven?” You would probably answer, yes. But there is no “up” in the new creation, and we ourselves don’t go “up” when we die. Nor down! Space and time are not part of a new creation. But we hope to *go* to heaven, so where is it? John Paul II gave a brief answer, right to the point: “heaven is where God is.” Yes, and God is everywhere.

One way to explain a little is to think about BEING. We all exist. But the verb means “to come out of.” Out of what? Being that begot us, that shares life with us. And at every moment sustains that life, keeps us in being. (no wonder a father of the church declared, “Let us undertake nothing, such as a new day, without first being gladdened by the thought of God”) All this is hugely easier when God entered uniquely into human life. Yes, the Incarnation. Jesus. And also, when Jesus taught us that God is more than Being. God is love. And loves us.

When the Greek philosophers, four and five centuries before Christ, reasoned superbly to the existence of God, they used terms like being. One. Uncreated One. No time, the eternal Now. But nowhere do they say *this eternal One loves us*. Socrates came close when he said, “it behooves us, befits us, to go to God as swiftly as possible.” How? He said, “by becoming like God.” And “this likeness consists of being just, holy, and wise.” But no mention of love and loving. For that we needed the prophets and supremely, the teaching and example of Jesus. And now Jesus returns to the Father, because he is one with the Father. A poem puts it best:

Prophet, teacher long foretold,  
light the darkness cannot hold—  
who is this one who knows our pain,  
love in whom we hope again?

THIS MAN IS FROM GOD.

Hurt like us, and healed,  
what power does he wield  
from our bondage to release  
and bring us to his peace?

THIS MAN IS FROM GOD.

We were blind, now we can see;  
we were bound, now we are free.  
Sin and sadness take their leave.  
Who is he, that we may believe?

THIS MAN IS FROM GOD.