

Chapter VIII

He Ascended Into Heaven

Translated From The French By MRS. J. Sadlier.
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SIXTH ARTICLE OF THE CREED.

Ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

126. The Taking Up of Elias (Elijah). - There is nothing in the Old Testament which more clearly typified the glorious Ascension of Our Lord into heaven, than the miraculous taking up of the prophet Elias (or Elijah). It took place in the reign of Joram, king of Israel, about 887 years before Christ. He had been apprised of the extraordinary favour which God meant to confer upon him, and desired, through humility, that no one might be a witness of it. But his disciple Eliseus (or Elisha) would never consent to leave him for a moment during the little time he had yet to spend on earth. So it was, also, with fifty others of his disciples, called the sons of the prophets, who happened to be in the vicinity of the mountain at the appointed moment. Elias and Eliseus repaired together to the banks of the Jordan; the former divested himself of the cloak which he wore on his shoulders, folded it, and struck with it the waters of the river, which opened immediately a passage for the two prophets of the Lord. Arriving at the other side, Eliseus besought his master to leave him his double spirit, viz.: of prophecy and miracles, to which Elias, after some hesitation, consented. As they walked on together, talking of these things, there appeared before them a fiery chariot, with horses which likewise appeared of fire. Elias mounted this chariot, which stopped beside him, and was gradually raised through the air in the midst of a whirlwind. When he had reached a certain height, he let fall his cloak, which Eliseus took, and by its means wrought afterwards a great number of prodigies. He thereby understood that the spirit of Elias, his master, had descended upon him. Such is the way, my young friends, in which the Scripture relates the taking up of the holy prophet; he disappeared from the world, but is not dead, and will one day come down on earth, to die and be raised to life with the rest of mankind. - II Book of Kings (IV Book of Kings in the Douay Bible), Chapter II.

127. The Prints of Our Lord's Feet on the Mount of Olives. - When Our Lord ascended into heaven, on Ascension Day, He left printed on the rocky surface of Mount Olivet the marks of His sacred feet. Here is what I have read on this subject in the Travels of Baron Geramb, who visited the Holy Land in 1833: "On the centre of the summit of the mountain, in a species of chapel, is seen in the rock the print made by Our Saviour's left foot, at the moment when He quitted the earth to ascend into heaven. It is confidently asserted that in former times the print of the right foot was likewise to be seen, but that it was taken away by the Turks to be placed in the Mosque of the Temple. As regards the print of the left foot, it exists in such a way as to leave no doubt whatever, although it is somewhat effaced by the kisses of the pilgrims of so many ages, and also, perhaps, by the pious thefts which even the strictest care could not always prevent. This part of the rock is now surrounded by masonry, and, (under the present administration of the Moslem Ottoman Turkish

Sultan), under charge of a Santon, a species of Turkish monk. This man is provided with small square stones, wherewith he touches the vestiges of Our Lord's foot, and afterwards presents to pilgrims in exchange for some trifling gratuity. Judging from the direction of this mark, Our Lord must have had His face turned towards the north when He ascended into heaven." Such, my dear children, is the account of the Baron de Geramb; all travellers have confirmed it, especially Mgr. de Mislin, who visited the Holy Places only a few years since I first took pen to paper to record these anecdotes. - MGR. MISLIN, *Les Saints Lieux* (The Holy Places), II., 468

128. St. Stephen's Vision. - Reciting the Creed, my dear friends, we say: Ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. Those words, sits at the right hand, signify that Jesus Christ, as man, occupies the first place in heaven, and that He is elevated above all creatures. We shall one day see Him when we go to keep Him company after our death; but there was a Saint who had that happiness, even during his life. This was Saint Stephen, the first deacon, and the first martyr. He was, says the Scripture, a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost, and who did great wonders and miracles amongst the people. The infatuated unbelieving Jews, especially those of the Synagogue of Jerusalem known as the Synagogue of the Freedmen (or of the Libertines), unable to withstand his wisdom and the power of his word, and yet unwilling to be converted by his preaching, stirred up the populace against him. They even went so far as to bribe persons to say that they had heard him blaspheme against Moses, and even against God himself. The high-priest had Stephen brought before him and the Sanhedran council. St. Stephen delivered, on that occasion, an admirable discourse, in which he proved to the Jews, his fellow co-religionists by race, how fatally they were mistaken in refusing to recognize Jesus Christ for the Messiah. Instead of listening to his words, they foamed and gnashed their teeth with rage. Then it was that St. Stephen, raising his eyes to heaven, visibly beheld God in His glory, and Jesus standing at His right hand, as if to assist in the combat, and the victory of the holy martyr. He then cried out, in the hearing of all the crowd: I see the heavens open, and the Son of Man at the right hand of God. But the unbelieving Jews, with loud shouts, closed their ears, rushed violently upon him, and, dragging him out of the city, stoned him to death, without any other form of trial. St. Stephen was the first who had the happiness of giving his life for the Gospel. One of the Jewish crowd who saw and approved of the killing was Saul of Tarsus who was to become Saint Paul. - Acts of the Apostles, chapter V. and following chapters.

129. A Pilgrim at the Mount of Olives. - Apropos to Our Lord's Ascension, I remember a very touching fact, related by St. Bernardine of Sienna, and again by St. Francis de Sales. In the time of the Crusades, a pious Frank gentleman, named Lethbald, born in the neighbourhood of Autun, undertook, with many others, the Pilgrimage of the Holy Land. Scarcely had he landed there, when he hastened to Nazareth, where the Blessed Virgin had dwelt when the Angel Gabriel came to announce to her the mystery of the Incarnation. Thence he set out for Bethlehem, and visited with love and with faith the grotto in which Our Lord came into the world. He then visited in succession the other places sanctified by the presence of that Divine Saviour: the Jordan, where He was baptized by St. John; the desert, where for forty days He fasted and prayed; the sea of Galilee, near to which He wrought so many miracles. But he paused particularly at the scenes which recalled to his mind the sufferings and death of his good Master. He witnessed, in spirit, His agony in the Garden of Olives, His humiliation in the house of Caiaphas, His scourging and crowning with thorns in that of Pilate. He followed Him step by step on the way to Calvary, trying in the depth of his heart to aid Him in bearing His Cross. Arrived at the summit, he fell prostrate on the ground, half dead with sorrow. Having remained several hours absorbed in his pious meditations, he repaired to the Holy Sepulchre, then climbed the Mount of Olives, whence Our Lord ascended into

heaven. "O my good Jesus!" he exclaimed, "I have followed You on earth through all the places sanctified by Your presence; I have seen all, from Your cradle to Your tomb; behold me now on the spot whence You did ascend into heaven. Whither can I go, O Lord, if not after You to heaven? Ah! permit me to follow You to Paradise!" At these words he feels himself ill, is brought back to Jerusalem to the Convent of the Fathers of the Holy Land, and two days after, he was in heaven. - DEVOUCOUX, *Legendaire d'Autun*, II., 216.
