

### **LOOKING UPWARDS**

One of the things I like doing with visitors here in Portsmouth is taking them up the Spinnaker Tower. It's great, 100 metres up, looking out over Pompey to the Isle of Wight. On a good day you can see past Southampton one way and Chichester the other. And you can do all that standing on a see-thru glass floor! But I like heights: mountains, buildings, panoramas. I like seeing the view. I like being at the top. It's exhilarating: it clears your head; it gives you a good perspective.

Today the Liturgy takes us to the heights for the finale of Jesus' earthly mission. After forty days he WAS LIFTED UP WHILE THEY LOOKED ON, St. Luke tells us; A CLOUD TOOK HIM FROM THEIR SIGHT. He ascended into heaven and is now seated at the right hand of the Father; from thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. The Ascension is important to us for two reasons. First, it is the moment when human nature transcends space and time to be with God, the gates of heaven open. But secondly, this insertion of the risen humanity of Jesus into the Blessed Trinity, so to speak, causes an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We'll celebrate that next week at Pentecost: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, on Mary, Peter and the Apostles and then on the rest of humanity. The feast of the Ascension then, should fill us with hope. We ascend the heights. We glimpse heaven. We contemplate the joy and happiness of the vitam venturi saeculi, the life of the world to come.

Today's secular culture is one of brilliant scientific, technological and medical advances, which bring comfort, convenience and a depth of affluence hitherto undreamt of. Yet this is also a culture in which true, genuine, lasting human happiness and fulfilment is as elusive as ever. Think of the inequalities in the world, the waste of natural resources, of family breakdown, of warring nations and the way some unborn children are treated. Secularism by its nature looks to earth not heaven. Its busyness, shopping and entertainment, makes little space for God, for the sacred canopy, for looking to the heights. Yet without the spiritual, ethics become groundless and personal morality a matter of choice with the consequence that society is drifting inexorably towards control, restriction and dictatorship. We can see this trend in the proposed redefinition of marriage and in the statements of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, which treat equality as sameness rather than complementarity and difference.

STAY IN THE CITY 'TIL YOU ARE CLOTHED WITH THE POWER FROM ON HIGH. But today we look beyond the horizon and the horizontal. We look upwards to where Jesus has gone in his human body. We glimpse the angels, saints and faithful departed and the happiness of the life to come. Yet as we do so, we remember the

Lord's words: wait in the city for the POWER FROM ON HIGH. As Catholics in contemporary culture we have a humanitarian mission: to witness to the full truth about God and the full truth about being human, with all that that means for an authentically human culture. This is why in this Ascension-Day Mass, we turn to the Heart of Jesus. Let us ask him to send us the Holy Spirit. Amidst the busyness of our lives on earth, may He give us the grace to live a more holy and fulfilled life ourselves and thus to give a clearer witness of faith to others. Indeed may the risen Body and Blood of Jesus we receive in Mass enable us one day ourselves to ascend the heights and so to live with him in happiness forever.