CHAPTER 19

CPG 4908 In S. Ascensionem Domini Nostri et Salvatoris Iesu Christi

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The edition of Eleni S. Chatzoglou-Balta is based on two manuscripts: the twelfth-century Scorialensis gr. 527 (W.II.10), fol. 47v-50v, and the 14–15th-century Vaticanus gr. 1192, fol. 74v-79. To judge from the frequency of citation in the homily, possible readings for the day are Psalm 109 (110):1, Dan 7:10–14, and Acts 1:9–11. There is no unambiguous reference to readings which the congregation have heard or sung.

1 Summary of Contents

The prooimion (4–11) is standard, referring to the ‘wonderful’ and ‘surprising’ nature of the feast and to the number of believers present (sic) who are celebrating it.

In the next section (12–30) the homilist dwells initially on the ‘wonder’ of the feast, referring to the ‘first fruits’ as the Lord goes up to the royal throne above heaven, where the Cherubim stand in fear (12–17). Acts 1:9 is cited, and the pericope “and a cloud took him out of their sight” gives the preacher the chance to ask why (17–22). Answer: the cloud is a symbol of heaven and indicates that that is the manner of the Lord’s ascent, not by means of a fiery chariot, as in the case of Elijah (22–24). Various other scriptural passages referring to clouds are cited (24–30).

On his ascension, continues the homilist, the Lord not only said that he was going but also that he would send the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete (31–32). The account of the ascension in Acts 1:10–11 is cited (34–41) to show that the two men in white robes were categorical in saying that the Lord will come in the same way as the disciples saw him ascend: he will not be sent, but will come of his own accord in the same way (41–54).

1 On the use of this expression, drawn from 1 Cor 15:20, 23, see the standard work by Elias Moutsoulas, “APARCHÉ: Ein kurzer Überblick über die wesentlichen Bedeutungen des Wortes in heidnischer, jüdischer und christlicher Literatur,” SacEr 15 (1964), 5–14.
The homilist pursues this theme in the following section, interpreting “in the same way he will come” as a second coming in the body (55–58). In addition, the words of the men in white – “why do you stand there looking into heaven?” – are explained as being a clear indication that the Lord has in fact ascended and the disciples are no longer expecting him (58–61). And since Christ effected his own ascent to the realm above heaven, it was different again from the case of Elijah, who relied on other means to get to heaven (61–71). And just as Christ was baptized in the flesh, so too should nobody doubt that he cut through the air with his flesh. But where was the shout, as expressed in Ps 46(47):5: “God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet?” Here there was only silence and the eleven disciples, showing that one must look behind the words for the real meaning (71–77). The shout indicates victory, the trophy, because the Lord went up in victory, overcoming death, overcoming sin and the devil, and taking our human nature to heaven. The trumpet sound calls everyone to the sacred spectacle, showing that the event is more powerful than any thunder-clap (78–90). The homilist then cites Ps 109 (110):1: “The Lord says to my lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool’” to show Christ’s place on the right and his consubstantiality with the Father (90–93).

“Have you seen the equality of their honour?” the preacher asks. Paul spoke of Christ making purification for our sins and the fact that “he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high” (Heb 1:3). This is truly a great gift (94–97). With these words Paul recalled the cross and raised the topic of the resurrection and ascension and their ‘ineffable unity’ (97–100). The Son is not inferior to the Father, continues the homilist, for who ever said to an angel “sit at my right hand?” The Father had one way of speaking to angels, and another way of speaking to his Son, for the former are created beings, while the Son is uncreated and equal in honour to the Father (100–107). Referring to Ps 44 (45):6 (“Your royal sceptre is a sceptre of equity”) the homilist points out that the sceptre is the symbol of royalty. Thus Daniel spoke of the created world of angels and archangels, whereas he said that the Son of Man was coming on the clouds until he reached the Ancient of Days (cf. Dan 7:13 [111–115]).

Next the homilist asks the congregation if they have seen how the prophets are in agreement in proclaiming the ascension (116–124). It was essential for Christ to rule forever so that his enemies could be made his footstool. This, however, does not mean that the Son is inferior to the Father or weaker, for Christ himself said: “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30 [124–125]). The homilist takes further pains to prove the equality of Father and Son on the basis of scriptural passages before concluding that not only they are indivisible but also the Spirit (126–138). The Father takes pride in the Son’s accomplishments – what