

Archbishop Smith: Whose Coattails?

Air travel allows for all sorts of interesting encounters with people. Once, while boarding a flight, I met a man who, judging from his accent, was from the deep South of the United States. When he saw me, he shouted out: "Hey there, Father! I'm sure glad to see you on this flight. If this here plane goes down, I'm gonna latch on to your coattails, 'cause I know where you're goin'!" Now, while I wouldn't dare presume that his assumption about my likely trajectory was justified, I was at least glad to think that even the possibility gave him some comfort.

That encounter raises an important question: where are we going? Where is our life journey headed? We need to grapple with this, because comprehending the destination is necessary to know if we are pointed in the right direction. I fear that many people give this little consideration, and thus live as if they were following a GPS route guidance without having entered arrival coordinates. This leads to making significant life-shaping decisions without the ability to know if one is taking a right or wrong turn. More troubling is the fact that many people have addressed the question, and, based upon the assumption that God does not exist, conclude that life has no direction and hence is without meaning. In this scenario, the only compass providing any kind of direction would be one's own immediate desires.

On Sunday, the Church celebrated the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, the triumphant return of the crucified and risen Christ to his Father in heaven. In this glorious event we have revealed to us by God Himself that our life does, indeed, have a destiny! Having fashioned us for Himself, God sent His Son to assume and redeem our human nature so that we might live with Him forever in an eternal participation in His own Triune life. The preface for the solemnity's mass puts it beautifully: "For the Lord Jesus, the King of glory, conqueror of sin and death, ascended to the highest heavens, as the Angels gazed in wonder. Mediator between God and man, judge of the world and Lord of hosts, he ascended, not to distance himself from our lowly state but that we, his members, might be confident of following where he, our Head and Founder, has gone before."

This wondrous tenet of our faith answers not only the question of our destiny but also that of "whose coattails" we need to "latch on to" if we are to attain it. Jesus Christ alone is the way to eternal life. This was his own testimony when he declared, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (*John 14:6*). The "latching on" happens by surrendering in faith to this truth and by embracing in humble obedience all that he commands.

The plane that day arrived at its destination without incident, and my American co-traveller didn't have to worry about how far away his seat was from mine. In

the course of our daily living, however, we all do need to take very careful note of our proximity to Christ. Let us remain always close to him in a union of faith and love, so that he will lead us by grace and mercy to where he has already preceded.