

Scripture Study

Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord – Cycle B



Opening prayer

Acts 1:1-11

(Psalm 47:2-3, 6-9)

Ephesians 1:17-23

Mark 16:15-20

Overview of the Gospel:

- This Sunday's Gospel takes up events from the day of the Resurrection after, to the disbelief of the apostles, Jesus has appeared to several people (Mark 16:1-14). In a greatly compressed account of events, it ends 40 days later when Jesus ascends into heaven.
- Both Jews and Greeks of the time would have been familiar with stories of heroes that were taken into heaven (for example, Heracles and, in some extra-biblical accounts, Moses). The major differences between these myths and the fact of Jesus' Ascension is that Jesus ascended under his own power rather than being "taken up," and that Jesus takes his place in heaven at the right hand of God the Father, a place of authority equal to the Father's.
- Through his Ascension, Christ accomplished several things: (1) he went up to heaven body and soul under his own divine power; (2) he took possession of the Kingdom he had won through his death on the Cross; (3) he went to prepare us a place in heaven (John 14:2; Revelation 3:21); (4) he sends the Holy Spirit to his Church at Pentecost.
- The Ascension of Our Lord is the sixth article of the Apostle's Creed and the second glorious mystery of the most holy Rosary.

Questions:

- In the 2nd reading verse 20 serves as sort of a "hinge verse" to the rest of the passage. In verses 21-23, what has Jesus accomplished? In verses 17-19, what promises are ours to claim?
- What is the scope of Jesus' "Great Commission" (verse 15; Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 24:46-48)? How far is his Kingdom to spread? Who has primary responsibility for spreading the gospel? Given the scope of the task, is it physically possible for them to accomplish this alone?
- In what two ways does Jesus tell the apostles they are to spread the gospel (verses 15-16)? Why are both necessary?
- Examine another account of Jesus' Ascension into heaven found in this Sunday's first reading (Acts 1:1-11). How long after the Resurrection did this occur? What will happen ten days later?
- Why was it necessary for Jesus' disciples to witness his Ascension into heaven? What did his Ascension accomplish as part of God's plan of salvation for us? In what two special ways does the Church invite us to meditate on this mystery?
- Why do you think miracles of the kind mentioned in verses 17-18 were common in the early Church? Why do they seem less common now? What is the purpose of miracles?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 659-657, 670, 183, 977, 1257, 1507

Closing prayer

"Perhaps someone will say within himself, 'I have already believed, I shall be saved.' He speaks true if his faith be supported by good works, for that only is true faith, which does not contradict in works what is believed in words." ~St. Gregory

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

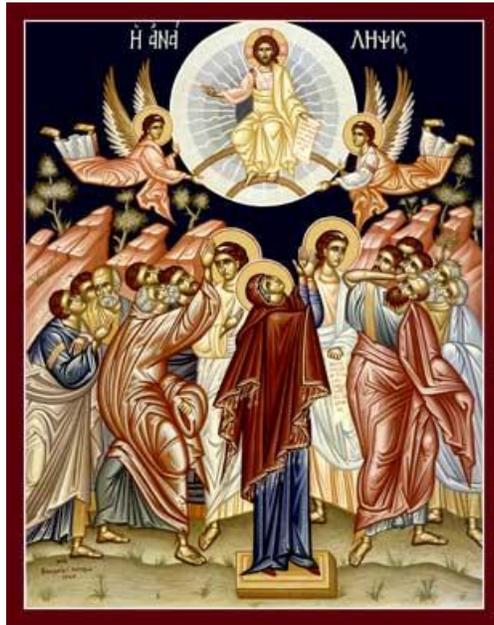
"The Lord Jesus was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God"

Scripture: Mark 16:15-20

15 And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." 19 So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. Amen.

Meditation: Why did Jesus leave his disciples forty days after his resurrection? Forty is a significant number in the scriptures. Moses went to the mountain to seek the face of God for forty days in prayer and fasting. The people of Israel were in the wilderness for forty years in preparation for their entry into the Promised Land. Elijah fasted for forty days as he journeyed in the wilderness to the mountain of God. For forty days after his resurrection Jesus appeared numerous times to his disciples to assure them that he had risen indeed and to prepare them for the task of carrying on the work which he began during his earthy ministry.

Jesus' departure and ascension was both an end and a beginning for his disciples. While it was the end of



Jesus' physical presence with his beloved disciples, it marked the beginning of Jesus' presence with them in a new way. Jesus promised that he would be with them always to the end of time (Matthew 28:20). Now as the glorified and risen Lord and Savior, ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven, Jesus promised to send them the Holy Spirit who would anoint them with power on the Feast of Pentecost, just as Jesus was anointed for his ministry at the River Jordan. When the Lord Jesus departed physically from the apostles, they were not left in sorrow or grief. Instead, they were filled with joy and with great anticipation for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' last words to his apostles point to his saving mission and to their mission to be witnesses of his saving death and his glorious resurrection and to proclaim the good news of salvation to all the world. Their task is to proclaim the gospel – the good news of

salvation – not only to the people of Israel, but to all the nations as well. God's love and gift of salvation is not reserved for a few or for one nation alone, but it is for the whole world – for all who will accept it. The gospel is the power of God, the power to release people from their burden of guilt, sin, and oppression, and the power to heal, restore, and make us whole. Do you believe in the power of the gospel?

This is the great commission which the risen Christ gives to the whole church. All believers have been given a share in this task – to be heralds of the good news and ambassadors for Jesus Christ, the only savior of the world. We have not been left alone in this task, for the risen Lord works in and through us by the power of his Holy Spirit. Today we witness a new Pentecost as the Lord pours out his Holy Spirit upon his people to renew and strengthen the body of Christ and to equip it for effective ministry and mission world-wide. Do you witness to others the joy of the gospel and the hope of the resurrection?

"Lord Jesus, through the gift of your Holy Spirit, you fill us with an indomitable spirit of praise and joy which no earthly trial can subdue. Fill me with your resurrection joy and help me to live a life of praise and thanksgiving for your glory. May I witness to those around me the joy of the gospel and the reality of your resurrection."

*Meditation: © 2012 Don Schwager
Daily Scripture Readings and Meditations
www.rc.net/wcc/readings/*