

Weekend Readings & Reflections

May 28-29, 2022: The Ascension of the Lord

Reflection: In today's First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles, St. Luke gives the surprising news that there is more of the story to be told. The story did not end with the empty tomb, or with Jesus' appearances to the Apostles over the course of forty days. Jesus' saving work will have a liturgical consummation. He is the great high priest, and He has still to ascend to the heavenly Jerusalem, there to celebrate the feast in the true Holy of Holies. The truth of this feast shines forth from the Letter to the Hebrews, where we read of the great high priest's passing through the heavens, the sinless intercessor's sacrifice on our behalf (see [Hebrews 4:14-15](#)). Indeed, His intercession will lead to the Holy Spirit's descent in fire upon the Church. Luke spells out that promise in the First Reading for the feast of the Ascension: "in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" ([Acts 1:5](#)). The Ascension is the preliminary feast that directs the Church's attention forward to Pentecost. On that day, salvation will be complete; for salvation is not simply expiation for sins (that would be wonder enough), but it is something even greater than that. Expiation is itself a necessary precondition of our adoption as God's children. To live that divine life we must receive the Holy Spirit. To receive the Holy Spirit we must be purified through Baptism. The Responsorial Psalm presents the Ascension in terms familiar from the worship of the Jerusalem Temple in the days of King Solomon: "God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord" (Psalm 47). The priest-king takes his place at the head of the people, ruling over the nations, establishing peace. The Epistle strikes a distinctively Paschal note. In the early Church, as today, Easter was the normal time for the baptism of adult converts. The sacrament was often called "illumination" or "enlightenment" because of the light that came with God's saving grace (see, for example, [Hebrews 10:32](#)). Saint Paul, in his Letter to the Ephesians, speaks in terms of glory that leads to greater glories still, as Ascension leads to Pentecost: "May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened," he writes, as he looks to the divinization of the believers. Their "hope" is "his inheritance among the holy ones," the saints who have been adopted into God's family and now rule with Him at the Father's right hand. This is the "good news" the Apostles are commissioned to spread—to the whole world, to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem—at the Ascension. It's the good news we must spread today.

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Welcome to our discussion for the Ascension of the Lord, let us begin with our morning offering:

All: O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer You my prayers, works, joys and sufferings of this day for all the intentions of Your Sacred Heart, in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world, in reparation for my sins, for the intentions of all my relatives and friends, and in particular for the intentions of the Holy Father. Amen.

Leader: Today we are going to look at the last moments before Jesus ascended to heaven, as He gives His parting words to His disciples. If you were going to leave your family and friends with one last instruction as to how to live their lives, what might you say? As Jesus prepares to ascend to heaven, He tells his friends that they can do nothing apart from the Holy Spirit. Let us reflect on this as we find what this all means in today's video.

Play the video on [FORMED.org](#):
[Opening the Word – The Ascension of the Lord \(Year C\)](#)

Digging Deeper The Ascension and the Way to the Father

For a deeper understanding of what the Ascension means to us, see Pope St. John Paul II's homily on the Solemnity of the Ascension of Our Lord in which he says:

"After having undergone the humiliation of his passion and death, Jesus took his place at the right hand of God; he took his place with his eternal Father. But he also entered heaven as our Head. Whereupon, in the expression of Leo the Great, the glory of the Head became the hope of the body. For all eternity Christ takes his place as the firstborn among many brethren: our nature is with God in Christ. And as man, the Lord Jesus lives forever to intercede for us with the Father. At the same time, from his throne of glory, Jesus sends out to the whole Church a message of hope and a call to holiness. Because of Christ's merits, because of his intercession with the Father, we are able to attain justice and holiness of life, in him."

FIRST READING ~ Acts 1:1-11 ~

In the first book, Theophilus, I dealt with all that Jesus did and taught until the day he was taken up, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them by many proofs after he had suffered, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While meeting with them, he enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for “the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak; for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” When they had gathered together they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He answered them, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight. While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven.”

In his prologue, Luke conveys to us the profoundly religious character of Acts which will give an account of events marking the fulfilment of the promises made by the God of Israel, the Creator and Savior of the world.

- *What stands out to you from this reading? What do the promises of God mean to you? Substitute your name for Theophilus, what is Luke trying to tell you?*

We witness in Acts, the early growth of the Church by the many miracles worked by the Holy Spirit.

- *How is the Holy Spirit working in your life today? Are you witnessing any miracles? How are you helping in the growth of the Church?*



SECOND READING ~ Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:19-23 ~

Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands, a copy of the true one, but heaven itself, that he might now appear before God on our behalf. Not that he might offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters each year into the sanctuary with blood that is not his own; if that were so, he would have had to suffer repeatedly from the foundation of the world. But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages to take away sin by his sacrifice. Just as it is appointed that men and women die once, and after this the judgment, so also Christ, offered once to take away the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to take away sin but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him. Therefore, brothers and sisters, since through the blood of Jesus we have confidence of entrance into the sanctuary by the new and living way he opened for us through the veil, that is, his flesh, and since we have "a great priest over the house of God," let us approach with a sincere heart and in absolute trust, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to our confession that gives us hope, for he who made the promise is trustworthy.

In Hebrews we read of the glorious ascension into heaven by Jesus Christ who crowns his redemptive sacrifice and intercedes for us as our advocate in the presence of God the Father.

- *What word or phrase jumps out at you in this reading*
 - *Why is this important? Why was it necessary for Jesus to leave earth and return to heaven?*
- Jesus' second coming will be not to take away sin but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him.*
- *How does this bring you hope? How can we better prepare for Jesus' second coming?*

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GOSPEL ~ Luke 24:46-53 ~

Jesus said to his disciples: "Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Then he led them out as far as Bethany, raised his hands, and blessed them. As he blessed them he parted from them and was taken up to heaven. They did him homage and then returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple praising God.

Jesus teaches his disciples all that they have witnessed and then explains to them to return to Jerusalem and wait to be "clothed with the power on high".

- *Reflect on an experience of listening to His Word. What is the difference between listening and hearing? Are we also to be clothed with power? What does this mean to you?*
- *What is God saying to you through this reading?*

The Apostles were filled with great joy and did Jesus homage by returning to Jerusalem and waiting. In the same way we celebrate the Ascension this weekend and Pentecost next.

- *What can I do this week to prepare/wait for Pentecost? How does all of this relate to my life here and now?*

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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 into heaven 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 from on high on the Feast of Pentecost, just as Jesus was anointed for his ministry at the River Jordan (Luke 3:21-22, 4:1,18). 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.

Why did the Risen Lord ascend into heaven? After ascending, the Lord Jesus in his glorified body now reigns as Lord over the heavens and the earth - over all that he has created. The Risen Lord reigns from the throne in heaven as our Merciful Redeemer and Gracious King. He intercedes for us and he empowers us through the outpouring of his Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus gives us new life in his Spirit and he strengthens us in faith, hope, and love so we can serve him and carry on his work as citizens of his kingdom here on earth.

Jesus' last words to his disciples points to the key mission and task he has entrusted to his followers on earth - to be his witnesses and ambassadors to the ends of the earth so that all peoples, tribes, and nations may hear the good news that Jesus Christ has come to set us free from sin, Satan, and death and has won for us a kingdom of peace, joy, and righteousness that will last forever. Jesus told his disciples, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you - and you shall be my witnesses... to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Jesus gives his followers the same power he received when the Holy Spirit came upon him and anointed him at the beginning of his mission (John 1:32-33). The Gospel is the power of God, the power to release people from their burden of sin, guilt, and oppression, and the power to heal, restore, and make us whole. Paul the Apostle reminds us that we are called to be ambassadors for Jesus Christ – thus we are appointed by the Lord Jesus to speak on his behalf and to bring others into a close and personal encounter with the Lord and Ruler of heaven and earth. 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.

- *How can we be effective witnesses and ambassadors for Christ?*
- *Do you witness to others the joy of the Gospel and the hope of the resurrection?*
- *Do you believe in the power of the Gospel to change and transform your life?*

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: In closing let us now pray together:

ALL: God our Father, our minds were prepared for the coming of Your kingdom when You took Christ beyond our sight so that we might seek Him in His glory. Make us joyful in His ascension. May we follow where He has led and find our hope in His glory, for He is Lord forever. Amen.

Leader: (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

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