

Ascension of the Lord

[Reading I: Acts 1:1-11](#)

[Responsorial Psalm: 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9](#)

[Reading II: Ephesians 1:17-23 or 4:1-13](#)

[Gospel: Mark 16:15-20](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/051621-Ascension.cfm>



The reading from the Acts of the Apostles (Luke) and the Gospel of Mark both address the same reality, the Ascension of Jesus. They share several points: Jesus instructed them, commissioned them, and was taken up before them.

Jesus instructed them about continuing his mission of bringing the good news of God's kingdom to the whole world. They are to announce the Gospel, the saving life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and offer baptism to those who respond. Baptism is the ritual participation in the dying and rising of Jesus. The response to the Gospel is not an intellectual ascent but a change in one's life. One must participate in the dying and rising, the surrender to the Father, and being raised by the Spirit to live in the newness of life.

Secondly, they were no longer just bringing a message to the Jewish people but to all the world. This is an immense undertaking, not just geographically but culturally, ethnically, religiously, and economically. Throughout the centuries, many women and men have dedicated their lives to this mission. The mission has moved forward in different places at different times. Simultaneously, the allurements of self-satisfaction and doing the minimum have diverted attention from the mission of Christ.

Thirdly, Jesus is "taken up" from them. There are several ideas alluded to by this phrase. First, Jesus is no longer seen by the Apostles as he was during his earthly life. He is now with them in a different way. For Luke, Jesus' presence is experienced by the Holy Spirit, who will dwell in them. For Mark, the signs (miracles) that are worked, are the manifestation that Jesus is with them.

Secondly, the reference to "in heaven" is not about a physical, geographical location. Heaven is about a relationship rather than a place. Unfortunately, our vocabulary about eternity is minimal, for our existence is always in a location. Being in heaven is about inaccessibility. Humanity does not have physical contact with Jesus now. Jesus is now with us in a new way.

Thirdly, taking his place at the right hand of the Father is an expression of authority. In formal royal court practice, the person seated to the monarch's right was the closest and most influential adviser. They could influence the decisions of the ruler. God is not a king in the human sense, and the relationship of the Father and Jesus is not just that of an advisor. They are one in being and have a common will for the good of humanity and all the created world. Jesus is in the relationship that has existed from the beginning and, through his resurrection, unites humanity with God forever.

In the Acts, Luke stresses the gift of Spirit to the disciples. Physical baptism is an immersing in water that expresses entering into and joining Jesus in his dying and rising. In the Acts, Jesus says that they will be baptized in the Holy Spirit. This will be an immersing into the Spirit, which empowered and guided Jesus. Believers will have that same empowerment and guidance that Jesus did if one is attentive to the Spirit.

Baptism in the Spirit has been a key expression of discipleship in the Pentecostal churches and to those in charismatic movements within Catholic and other Protestant churches. This

empowerment for ministry has compelled many to dedicate themselves to different ministries. Some examples are offered in I Corinthians, Romans, and the optional reading from Ephesians 4 for Ascension. This highlights that any ministry is not something that an individual chooses but one to which the Spirit calls a person.

Acts also raised the issue of restoring the kingdom of Israel. King David had established a physical kingdom for the tribes of Israel. It remains intact during the reign of his son Solomon. Following Solomon's death, the kingdom split into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Israel ended when the Assyrians conquered it in 721 BC. Judah continued until it was conquered by Babylon in 597 and again in 587 BC. There was a brief renewal of the southern kingdom, but the Greeks and then the Romans later conquered it.

The expectation was that the Messiah (Anointed One) would reestablish a physical kingdom centered in Jerusalem. This is the expectation behind the question in Acts. Jesus deflects the question by saying that the Father is the only one who knows about establishing a kingdom. The focus of disciples should be on announcing the Good News. There have been various attempts to establish a Christian kingdom on earth, and all have failed. God works through conversion, not power.

The cloud taking him from their sight connects to a vision in the book of Daniel (7: 13-14). It describes the Ancient of Days (God) giving power and authority to "one like a son of man" (A human). It connects Jesus' arrival in the court of God on a cloud.

The timing of the Ascension is presented differently in the Gospels. The Gospel of John seems to indicate that it happened on Easter. Luke presents it forty (in God's unique time) days after Easter. Matthew presents it happening in Galilee while Luke says outside Jerusalem. John seemingly has it from near the tomb. What is the significance of it?

The Ascension celebrates the way Jesus is present with us now. We are not losing out because we live almost 2100 years later. Jesus is one with the Father and the Spirit. We, too, are in a relationship with them through the words of scripture, through the sacraments, through connectedness with other believers, through the mission that we continue in Christ's name, and the ways God is at work in us, through us and around us.

There are two options for the second reading, and both are from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. The first is a prayer for the Ephesians and for us asking God to open our understanding of the great work that was accomplished in Jesus. It is chosen for the Ascension both because of the reference to God seating Jesus at his right hand and the reference to Christ as head of the church. This shows another way that Jesus is with us. (The second and third sentences are really one sentence in Greek. I am glad that I do not need to diagram it for grammar class.)

The second passage calls for unity and oneness as Jesus and the Father are one. It addresses the reason for the Ascension in looking at the fact that Jesus descended to be with us and is now returning to his original place. It also includes a reflection on the ministries of the church, which are needed to continue the work of Jesus. These are the ways that God works through individuals to continue the mission of Jesus.

Themes:

Ascension of Jesus
Holy Spirit

Jesus' presence through his word and his Spirit
Evangelization

Reflection Questions:

How are you aware of God's presence in your life?

What gifts or graces do you desire from the Spirit?

How will these gifts help you to further the mission of Jesus in the world today?

What does evangelization mean to you?

Listen to Paul's prayer as a prayer for you. What stands out to you?

Suggestions for prayer:

For the Church: that, empowered by the Spirit, we may faithfully give witness to the Gospel and continue Christ's mission of bringing hope and healing to all

For greater unity in the Church: that we may be one in faith, one in hope, and one in the peace of the Holy Spirit

For a spirit of evangelization: that we may allow the Spirit to work through our words, deeds, and relationships to draw others to Christ

For a deepening of our relationship with God: that through hearing God's call more clearly, we may love others as God has loved us and continue the mission of Jesus today

For the grace to be fearless: that we may follow God's call confidently and trust that God will guide and protect us through all challenging situations