

May 29, 2022

Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord

Luke 24:46-53

A Note: In most dioceses in the United States, the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord is celebrated on the 7th Sunday after Easter. Therefore, the focus here is the gospel text of the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord.

Luke 24:46-53

Jesus said to the disciples, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah 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.

Background:

Luke presents two accounts of the Ascension. One is in the first verses of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:1-11) and is the first reading for today. Luke's second description of the Ascension is the gospel text for today. In the Acts account, the Ascension looks forward to the coming of the Holy Spirit, the missionary activity of the early Church to the ends of the earth, and the future establishment of the fullness of the reign of God.

The gospel account focuses on the Ascension as the culmination of Jesus' ministry, and his departure. Jesus gives one last very short instruction to the disciples before he is taken up into heaven. He tells them that the core of his teaching and the events of his death and resurrection have all been predicted in the earlier writings of their tradition. By making only a general reference to the events of Jesus' ministry and their tradition, Luke casts all of Jesus' life and ministry in the light of the religious tradition of the people of Israel.

Another way that Luke expresses the connection between His ministry and their tradition is by emphasizing the importance of the holy city, Jerusalem, and the small village of Bethany. Bethany is on the Mount of Olives. After Jesus' ascension from there, the disciples return to Jerusalem and to the temple to praise God. While these two places are associated with Jesus' suffering and death, they now take on new meaning and are linked to Jesus' ultimate glory. Jerusalem and the temple were the center of Jewish faith. The disciples entered the city not to hide behind locked doors, but to go into the temple praising God. The importance of Jerusalem is a constant theme throughout these verses.

Noticeably absent from the description of the ascension is any sign of cosmic reaction, angelic presence, or divine recognition of Jesus' final return. The cosmic expression of what has happened is not to be found in heaven, but in God working in and among the disciples as they take the message of Jesus to all the nations. Next Sunday, the feast of Pentecost, the cosmic signs of God's presence will begin to be manifested in the disciples carrying on the mission they have received. For now, the disciples and the church are in a kind of in-between time, between the Resurrection and Jesus' return with the fullness of God's reign. But what is presented here is that the disciples experience the departure of Jesus through a lens of faith. They return from the Ascension filled with a great joy. They are continuously present in the temple praising God. The cosmic impact of what God is doing, which was part of other events of the gospels, is now present inwardly in the lives of the disciples.

Reflection Questions:

1. Can you describe your initial response to news of the passing of a person of significance to you?
2. After some appropriate period, how has that person impacted how you live?
3. Have you ever been aware in some way that you needed to move on from where you were or what you were doing?

4. What kind of thoughts and feelings might the early disciples have had as they heard Jesus tell them that what had taken place with his death and rising, and that they were now to be the witnesses to the ends of earth, was all found in their sacred writings?
5. How would you respond if you had been among them?
6. The last line of the gospel says, "They did him homage and then returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple praising God." What strikes you about this description of the disciples?
7. Can you take some time now to talk with God honestly about your experience of loss in your own life, about the Ascension of Jesus and its meaning for you, or about your own feelings about Jesus' presence or absence in your own life?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fsccll.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for May 29, 2022, the Solemnity of The Ascension of the Lord

In the first book, 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. He presented himself alive to them after he had suffered, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. He enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for "the promise of the Father; for in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." 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. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; 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 into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going."

*God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord.
All you peoples, clap your hands, shout to God with cries of gladness,
For the Lord, the Most High, the awesome, is the great king over all the earth.
Sing praise to God; sing praise to our king. For the king of all the earth is God;
sing hymns of praise. God reigns over the nations, God sits upon his holy throne.*

Brothers and sisters: May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. May your hearts be enlightened, that you may know the hope that

belongs to his call, the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and the greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with his great might: which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him above every principality, authority, power, and dominion, above every name in this age and in the age to come. He put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.

Or: Christ did not enter into a copy of the true sanctuary, 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; 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 to take away sin by his sacrifice. Just as 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 await him. Therefore, since through the blood of Jesus we have confidence of entrance into the sanctuary, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach in absolute trust, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water. Let us hold to our confession that gives us hope, for he who made the promise is trustworthy.

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. Behold I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." He led them out as far as Bethany, and raised his hands, and 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.

Excerpts from Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47:2-9; Ephesians 1:17-23/ Hebrews 9:24-28, 10:19-23; Luke 24:46-53

From Joe:

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for May 29th, which is the Seventh Sunday of Easter, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. This week's reflection is for the Feast of the Ascension, since Sunday is when the Ascension is celebrated throughout most of the US. The gospel is from the end of the gospel of Luke, where Jesus reminds his disciples that it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise, and that repentance would be preached in his name to all nations. He also tells them to wait first in Jerusalem until he sends "the promise of my Father," the Holy Spirit. Then, "he led them out as far as Bethany, and as he blessed them he parted from them and was taken up into heaven."

The other readings also have references to Jesus Christ going to and being in heaven. In the first reading, from the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, Luke retells in more detail what he described only briefly at the end of his gospel. "Jesus said, 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.' Then he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight." Psalm 47 proclaims, "The Lord is the great king over all the earth. God reigns over the nations." There are two options for the second reading. In the one from Ephesians, Paul writes, "May God give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation, resulting in knowledge of him and his power which he worked in Christ, raising him and seating him far above, at his right hand in the heavens." In the option from Hebrews, "Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands, but the true one, heaven itself. Through him we have confidence of entrance into this sanctuary."

Joe