

May 21, 2023

The Ascension of the Lord

Matthew 28:16-20

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

Background:

Matthew devotes only twenty verses (chapter 28) to the resurrection. It would be worth reading the chapter in its entirety. But here is a summary of the events as they are recorded by Matthew:

At dawn on the first day of the week both Mary and Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. They witnessed an earthquake and an angel rolling back the stone from the cave. The angel instructed them to go to the disciples and tell them, "He has been raised from the dead, and he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him." (Matthew 28:7) The Marys left the tomb fearful yet overjoyed and ran to the disciples. On their way they encountered Jesus himself who told them, "Do not be afraid, go tell my brothers to go to Galilee and there they will see me." (Matthew 28:10) They were frightened but ran to tell the disciples. Soldiers who had been guarding the tomb told the high priests what had happened. The chief priests and the leaders met and decided to bribe the soldiers to say that Jesus' disciples had come in the night and carried off the body. The soldiers took the money and did as they were told. Matthew states that the people of Judea still tell this story. The remainder of the chapter is the text for this Sunday's Gospel.

While Luke's Gospel and Mark's longer version of the Gospel's ending speak of the ascension of Jesus, Matthew only hints at it. Here in Matthew, Jesus instructs the disciples to meet in Galilee, the place from which the ministry of Jesus first began. It will also be the place from which the disciples' ministry will begin. They will encounter the risen Jesus on a mountaintop. Throughout the Gospel the mountain has been a place of prayer and revelation. (Matthew 5:1, 14:31, & 15:29) The mountain was also the place where Moses received his last instruction (Deuteronomy 32:48-33:29). Matthew indicates the disciples both worshiped and doubted when they encountered the risen Lord. Even in this extraordinary encounter, the disciples are capable of two seemingly opposite emotions.

The Gospel for today also demonstrates that the two Marys were faithful to what they had been commissioned to do: go tell the disciples. Despite being caught in the two emotions of joy and fear, they acted. The opening of the text reminds the reader that the disciples were also faithful to what was asked of them. They were instructed to go to Galilee to meet Jesus. They too were caught between two emotions: doubt and worship. But they were still commissioned "to make disciples of all the nations," to baptize, and to teach (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus' earlier instruction to the disciples not to enter a pagan or Samaritan area has now been set aside (Matthew 10:5). They are to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The fact that we will gather to celebrate this feast is evidence that the disciples were also faithful to the commissioning they received from Jesus in today's Gospel. They and all who have come after them have been faithful in passing on their relationship with God from one person to the next, down to us. Because of this faithfulness from generation after generation, we gather as a Church to celebrate our relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you experience God?
2. Have you ever had an extraordinary experience of God's presence?
3. What are some of the emotions you would use to describe your own experience of God's presence?

4. How do you understand your relationship to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit?
5. When the disciples saw Jesus, they worshiped and they doubted. What does that suggest to you about their relationship to Jesus?
6. Jesus' command is that we are to make disciples of people of every nation, to baptize, and to teach everything that Jesus taught. How do you feel about being commissioned by Jesus?
7. Where are the places that you are trying to live Jesus' instruction?
8. Can you take some time to talk with God about how you are feeling as you listen to this Gospel?

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://fscclalledtobe.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 21, 2023, The Ascension of the Lord

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. He presented himself alive to them 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. 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 as he was going, two men in white garments stood beside them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven."

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.

God mounts his throne amid shouts of joy; the Lord, amid trumpet blasts.
Sing praise to God, sing praise; For king of all the earth is God.
God reigns over the nations, God sits upon his holy throne.

Brothers and sisters: May God give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and what is the surpassing 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 at his right hand, far above every authority and power, and every name that is named in this age and in the one 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.

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

Excerpts from Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47:2-3, 6-9; Ephesians 1:17-23; and Matthew 28:16-20

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for May 21st, the Ascension of the Lord, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. A description of the Ascension is presented in the first reading; the Gospel of Matthew does not describe this event. This Sunday, the Gospel for the Ascension is the last five verses of Matthew's Gospel. On a mountaintop in Galilee, Jesus tells his disciples, "Make disciples of all nations, baptize them, and teach them all I commanded you. I am with you always, until the end of the age."

The other readings also have references to the coming of the Spirit, disciples witnessing to all nations, and Jesus' reign to the end of the age. In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus tells his disciples, "In a few days you will be baptized by the Holy Spirit. You will receive power when he comes upon you. You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth." Then he is lifted up into heaven, and two men in white tell them, "He will return in the same way." Psalm 47 declares, "God mounts his throne to shouts of joy. The Lord is king over the nations, over all the earth." In the second reading, from the letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes, "May God give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. He raised Christ from the dead, seating him at his right hand, head over all things in this age and the one to come."

Here is more of the message, in more words from these readings: May the church which is his body, us who believe, knowing what are the riches of glory in his inheritance, sing praise to God the awesome king, to Jesus who has been taken up, who will return in the same way, and who is with us always. May the joy of the Easter season remain with you!

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!