

May 12, 2024
Ascension of the Lord (7th Sunday of Easter)
Mark 16:15-20

NOTE: Most dioceses in the United States celebrate the feast of the Ascension on the 7th Sunday of Easter. Therefore, the background and reflection questions here will focus on the Gospel for the Feast of the Ascension.

Mark 16:15-20

Jesus said to his disciples: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents with their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.

Background:

The early Christians understood the Lord's ascension as part of Jesus' resurrection, and not as a separate historical event in the life of Jesus. For example, in Luke's Gospel the events of that first day of the week include the three who were going to anoint the body of Jesus but discover the empty tomb, Jesus' revealing himself to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, his appearance and commissioning of the disciples in Jerusalem, and his ascension. As Luke records his Gospel, all these things happen on the first day of the week.

The verse immediately before this Gospel reading begins (Mark 16:14) makes it clear that the disciples are at table when Jesus enters their presence. He rebukes them for their lack of faith because they had not believed those who saw him after the resurrection. The Gospel text commissions them to go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel. Those who believe are to be baptized. As proof of their new relationship with Jesus, they will be able to do extraordinary things. Having commissioned them, Jesus is taken up to heaven.

While this Gospel is short (only six verses), it is pivotal. Jesus commissions the disciples to preach the Gospel to all: men and women, Jew and Gentile. They are given extraordinary power. This is the last directive Jesus gives them before he leaves their company through the power of God to sit at the right hand of God. There can be no doubt that this is by the hand of God that Jesus is taken from them. From this moment on, they will represent God's presence in the world. With Jesus gone, the Christian community will turn to them for instruction.

Reflection Questions:

1. We all experience departures as part of our life. What are some departures that have been significant for you? What were the circumstances of those departures? What were the feelings you experienced at the time? What are your feelings now as you recall those experiences?

2. When have you initiated the departure, and when has it been thrust upon you?
3. Considering some of departures that came to mind more deeply, how were you shaped or changed by those events?
4. Has there ever been a time when you felt like God had abandoned you?
5. Looking into the scriptures, how were the disciples changed by the Ascension?
6. In the opening line of this Gospel text, Jesus asked the disciples to go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature. When you hear these words today, what do you hear God saying to you?
7. Can you take some time now to personally talk with God about whatever it is that arises within you as you reflect with this Gospel text?

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.

Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Please include this information when printing or forwarding.

Excerpts from the readings for May 12, 2024, The Ascension of the Lord

The first book dealt with all that Jesus did and taught until the day he was taken up. He presented himself alive to them during forty days, speaking about the kingdom of God. He enjoined them 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." 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 at the sky as he was going, two men in white stood beside them. They said, "This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way."

*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, 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 the God of our Lord Jesus Christ give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. May you know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power, which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens. And he put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church.

Alternative Reading 2

Brothers and sisters, I urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with humility, gentleness, patience, and love, through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope; one God and Father of all, who is over all and in all. But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. The one who descended is also the one who ascended above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. He gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain faith in the Son of God.

Jesus said to his disciples: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents with their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.

Excerpts from Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47:2-3, 6-9; Ephesians 1:17-23; Ephesians 4:1-13; and Mark 16:15-20

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for May 12th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. On this seventh Sunday of the Easter season, the Ascension is celebrated in most US dioceses. The Gospel from Mark tells one of the Ascension stories from the New Testament. Jesus tells his disciples, "Go into the whole world and proclaim

the Gospel.” He also describes some signs by which believers will be known. Then “he was taken up into heaven, and took his seat at the right hand of God.”

Some of the other readings also have direct references to the Ascension, and to the Lord taking his throne. The first reading is another version of the Ascension story, this one being from the Acts of the Apostles. Jesus tells his disciples, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses, 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.” Psalm 47 exclaims, “The Lord is the great king over all the earth. God mounts his throne amid shouts of joy.” There are two options for the second reading, both from the letter to the Ephesians. In the first option, Paul writes, “May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation, that you may know he raised Christ and seated him at his right hand in the heavens.” In the second option, he writes, “I urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, striving to preserve the unity of the one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father. The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens.”

Mark’s Gospel goes on, “They went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.” In the reading from Acts, after Jesus was taken up, suddenly two men in white stood beside them and said, “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.”

Joe

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