

We are in the midst of the Easter season, the longest season of the Church year, lasting from Easter Sunday until the feast of Pentecost, which is next week. Today is a special feast day during which we celebrate the fact that after Jesus spent time with His disciples, He ascended into heaven. As we have discussed throughout the Easter Season, to ascend means to rise up through the air. So Jesus was speaking with His disciples, and He just started rising up into the sky in front of them. Just imagine what that must have been like to see.

Today's readings provide us with two accounts of Jesus' ascension. The first one comes from the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, and the second one comes from the *Gospel* of St. Luke. Both accounts were written by the same person. At the beginning of both books, the author addresses someone named Theophilus. The big mystery is that no one knows for sure who exactly Theophilus is. He could be anyone of many different people. Theophilus in Greek means "God lover." So he could also be all Christians who, in fact, love God, which would mean that Luke's gospel and the Acts of the Apostles are for all Christians to read, including us. What is missing from our reading today is the verse which explains that Jesus appeared to His disciples during the forty days which followed His raising from the dead. In the Bible the number forty often has to do with a period of testing or preparing followed by triumph. Noah spent forty days in the ark and then successfully found land to resume society after the flood. Moses spent forty days on Mount Sinai two different times before receiving God's laws. He led the Jews through the desert for forty years after escaping from Egypt. Elijah also spent forty days wandering through the desert. And Jesus fasted for forty days after He was baptized before beginning His ministry. So here the disciples had access to Jesus for forty days before He ascended into heaven, before they were sent out by Jesus to preach the gospel to the whole world.

The Acts of the Apostles, remember, replaces the Old Testament as the source of the first readings at Mass during the Easter season. It is the history of the early church, beginning with Jesus' ascension. We return to Old Testament readings at Mass after next week's feast of Pentecost, the end of the Easter season. So now...

The beginning of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:1-2a, 8-11)

In the first book, Theophilus, I dealt with all that Jesus did and taught until the day that He was taken up. Jesus told His disciples: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power. Then [because you saw Me suffer, die, and come back to life] you will tell everyone about Me in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and everywhere in the world." After Jesus had said this and while they were watching, He was taken up into a cloud. They could not see Him, but as He went up, they kept looking up into the sky. Suddenly two men dressed in white clothes were standing there beside them. They said, "Why are you men from Galilee standing here and looking up into the sky? Jesus has been taken to heaven. But He will come back in the same way that you have seen Him go." The Word of the Lord.

So here are all the disciples standing there looking up at the clouds where Jesus just went with their mouths open, half amazed and half in disbelief, when these two men in white clothes ask them what are they standing there for? Jesus will be back. He said He will be back. So what are you doing just standing here looking up into the sky? He said you have work to do. Go back to Jerusalem and wait, like He told you to, for the Holy Spirit. (Spoiler alert: the Holy Spirit comes in just as amazing a fashion. For that you will have to wait for Pentecost Sunday next week.)

Today's psalm is Psalm 47.

Responsorial Psalm (Psalm 47:1-2, 5-6, 7-8)

God mounts the throne to shouts of joy.

God mounts the throne to shouts of joy.

All of you nations, clap your hands and shout joyful praises to God.
The Lord Most High is fearsome, the ruler of all the earth.

God mounts the throne to shouts of joy.

God goes up to His throne, as people shout and trumpets blast.
Sing praises to God, our King.

God mounts the throne to shouts of joy.

God is ruler of all the earth! Praise God with songs. God rules the
nations from His sacred throne.

God mounts the throne to shouts of joy.

This psalm sings praises to God on His throne. But as you read or listen to the words, you cannot tell if it refers to God the Father or God the Son, both of Whom sit on thrones, even though the psalms are from the Old Testament before Jesus was born. So this psalm in particular, and the psalms in general, are not just prayers from the Old Testament. They are for both Jews and Christians alike. *Next is...*

A reading from the letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians (Ephesians 1:17-21)

Sisters and brothers: I ask the glorious Father and God of our Lord Jesus Christ to give you His Spirit. The Spirit will make you wise and let you understand what it means to know God. My prayer is that light will flood your hearts and that you will understand the hope that was given to you When God chose you. Then you will discover the glorious blessings that will be yours together with all of God's people. I want you to know about the

great and mighty power that God has for us followers. It is the same wonderful power He used when He raised Christ from death and let Him sit at His right side in heaven. There Christ rules over all forces, authorities, powers, and rulers. He rules over all beings in this world and will rule in the future world as well. The word of the Lord.

St Paul's reading emphasizes two things: 1-the "glorious blessings" and the "great and mighty power" God has for His followers; 2-Christ's rule over everyone and everything now and into the future, sitting at the right side of God the Father in heaven.

Today's gospel reading is the ending of the gospel of St. Luke. Just like in today's reading from Acts, there are some missing verses which help us to understand better what God is trying to tell us. First Jesus tells them that Scripture predicted that the Messiah, the Savior, that is, Jesus, would have to suffer, die, and rise from the dead. And that forgiveness of sins would be preached in His name to all nations in the world, starting in Jerusalem. Jesus tells His disciples that they are His witnesses. His instructions to the apostles in today's first reading from the Acts are similar, "...tell everyone about Me in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and everywhere in the world." Then Christ's actual ascension story is very short.

The ending of the holy gospel according to St. Luke (Luke **24:50-53**).

Jesus led His disciples out of Bethany, where He raised His hands and blessed them. As He did this, He left and was taken up to heaven. After His disciples had worshiped Him, they returned to Jerusalem and were very happy. They spent their time in the temple, praising God. The gospel of the Lord.

The ascension story which begins the Acts of the Apostles is similar to the ascension story which ends the gospels of Sts. Luke and Mark (which should not surprise anyone, since the stories are about the same thing). The stories have the apostles directed to preach about

the good news of Jesus beyond Jerusalem while Jesus goes up to heaven to assume His role as heavenly King of the universe, as described in the psalm, in St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, and in St. Mark's gospel (from last year), at His Father's right side according to both St. Paul and in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, which we recite at Mass. There is so much agreement in the scripture readings. Now that Jesus, our risen Lord and Savior, has assumed His role as King of the Universe in heaven, and He wants the apostles *and all of us* to spread His good news throughout the world.

And that, girls and boys, is the lesson in today's readings. Speak about it with your parents.

Ascension of the Lord, 2022
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