

## The Ascension of the Lord – May 28, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

### Scripture Reading: Acts 1:1-11

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 whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them by many proofs 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 by his own authority. 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 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 from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven."

### Psalm: Ps 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9

R. (6) 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;  
sing praise to our king, sing praise.

For king of all the earth is God;  
sing hymns of praise.  
God reigns over the nations,  
God sits upon his holy throne.

### Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:17-23

Brothers and sisters: May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, 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 the exercise of his great might, which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens, far above every principality, authority, power, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come. And 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.

### Gospel: 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."



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### **INVITATION TO PRAY**

*Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.*

#### **Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.**

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

### **INVITATION TO REFLECT**

Jesus has a deep insight into the human heart and into the laws that govern it. The First Reading provides mild hints: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” and, “Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.” Alright, but what does God’s holiness look like? The Responsorial Psalm puts it this way: The Lord is kind and merciful. He pardons all your iniquities, heals all your ills. He redeems your life from destruction, crowns you with kindness and compassion. This description of God sounds comforting. We can try to love this way, if we work hard enough, can’t we? Hmmm. Well, let’s look at the Gospel. It has Jesus’ own guidelines for imitating God. As he did last week, he quotes the old laws, and then he opens them up, giving us a view of their insides. *Old Rule:* “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” *New Rule:* offer no resistance to one who is evil. ... If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand over your cloak as well. ... Do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.”

#### **Real love is what we are after.**

Difficult, difficult. When I lived in Berkeley, California, some beggars admitted frankly that they had a quota to make before they could go home. And sometimes a large, expensive car would come pick them up at five or six pm! It was a conspiracy. Should I have peeled off my coat for the syndicate? Maybe so. They are poor. I cannot turn my back on the poor, can I? I have to crown them with kindness and compassion. Yet wouldn’t I be a patsy if I did? Help! *Old Rule:* “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” *New Rule:* “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” The heavenly Father loves and rewards both the bad and the good, the just and the unjust. “Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Really, isn’t that just absurd? We are tiny ants compared to God, crawlers on rocks that flew loose from the big bang. How are we supposed to be giant, like God? Jesus had better have a very deep insight into the human heart and the laws that govern it. And he does. “You are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you.” (Second Reading) Let me translate. God built the human heart “with a hole in it.” This is an openness that can let others in—if we don’t block it with selfishness, and if we grow into it. We can even let God’s own self in, and he will stretch our stunted outreach to others so that we will truly give out of love. He even says as much at the Ascension. 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. A word of warning: should I give to a beggar employed by a syndicate? Probably not. It is not for his good. Should a wife stay home where her husband beats her up regularly? No is the answer, because this is not “giving out of love,” it is trying to cuddle a rabid dog. Real love is what we are after, the kind Jesus describes and which God pulls us toward.

### **INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING**

1. Jesus said his apostles they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. They would be his witnesses unto the ends of the earth. On whom did the disciples depend for understanding of what that meant for them? Did they understand right away or did it take some time? On whom do we depend for any spiritual understanding?
2. God gave Christ “the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.” What is this fullness? What might be some “everyday kinds of fullness”? What kind of fullness would you like to have in your life?
3. “Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” Jesus said this after telling the eleven to make disciples of all nations. Discuss what Pope Francis said about that: *He is with God the Father, where he always intercedes in our favor. Jesus is no longer in a definite place in the world as he was before the Ascension. He is now in the lordship of God, present in all space and time, next to each of us. In our life we are never alone: we have this Advocate who awaits us, who defends us.*

### **INVITATION TO ACT**

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

### **CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY**

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following: Gladden us with holy joys, almighty God, and make us rejoice with devout thanksgiving, for the Ascension of Christ your Son is our exaltation, and, where the Head has gone before in glory, the Body is called to follow in hope. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen