

The Ascension of the Lord – May 13, 2018 – 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.

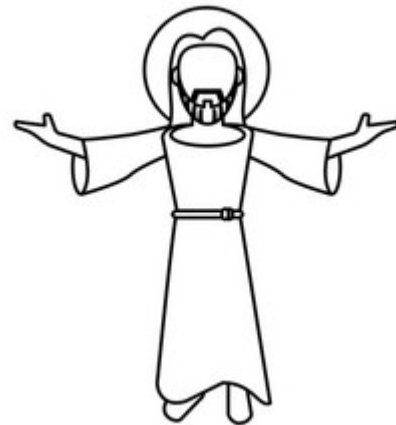
Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:17-23

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: 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.



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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

At the end of each school year, in American schools such as Saint Louis University, the students, along with their networks of friends, scatter and fly away. A presider at a recent Mass admitted with beautiful poignancy how much we miss them when the school year ends. I can remember that from my own college days. It happened especially if I was delayed in leaving for home: empty halls and rooms and broad, completely undisturbed yards of grass. We were all glad to have the year done but, at the same time, why did the buildings seem so deserted and where was the buzzing and intermingling student life? Maybe this is a hint at the hollowness Jesus' disciples must have felt after the crucifixion, especially the women who had loved Jesus so much. The passion had been the worst part, as we said last week. But now, nothing. What could ever fill that gaping emptiness? Graduated college students find ways to cope with their new lives apart from each other and, besides, who wants to stay in school forever? But what sort of lives were Jesus' followers to find after the very center of their lives had given way? Well, you say, there was the Resurrection. Correct, but we saw last week how confusing this was to the disciples. "I will not believe this unless I put my hands on him," said doubting Thomas. And Jesus' new presence did not last very long did it? There came this event called the Ascension.* It emptied the school yards and hallways for good. It was joyous, I suppose, but why did he have to go away so thoroughly?

Here is one way to look at it: he had graduated from life into Life. Having tunneled through the narrow passageway of death—as you and I will do one day—he had given everything he possessed and everything he was to the Father out of sheer love. Instead of there being nothing left, there was humanity transformed: a divine/human person most thoroughly divine and human, now marked obviously with the totality of love. He was on his way back to the dynamic, swirling, trinitarian circle of love from which his humanity had issued in the first place. After the Resurrection, he had lingered in order to tell us about it, to comfort us, to ease the loss. But what then? "Stay in Jerusalem until my Spirit comes to fill your heart," Jesus said to his followers (First Ascension Reading). They were going to be filled "with all humility and gentleness, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit" (Second Ascension Reading). The immense act of modest love that was the resurrection was going to be poured into us and it would be called the Holy Spirit. Jesus would continue to be alive within the world after all, but in a different form: that of our own human bodies and those of our neighbors. Loss and absence would be turned into real presence. In the Eucharistic Prayer and Communion, we consent to have his body and blood mingle with our own body and blood. The Spirit comes to live in us, inviting us to accept his whole life, death, and resurrection, as these settle into us and into others around us. This real presence now knocks on our doors, urging us, gently nudging us to say yes.

*The Church provides an embarrassment of riches in the readings this week. Some few dioceses (the ecclesiastical provinces of Boston, Hartford, New York, Newark, Philadelphia, and Omaha) celebrate the feast of Ascension on Thursday, and therefore today they will use the readings from the Seventh Sunday of Easter. Most others have the Ascension feast on Sunday and use the Ascension readings instead of those from the Seventh Sunday. In either case there are a number of possible second readings for Ascension. So let us simply talk in this space about the Ascension itself.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. What would prompt the two men dressed in white suddenly to appear and say to the apostles, "Why are you standing there looking at the sky?" Jesus had just given his friends a big assignment, witnessing to the ends of the earth. What do you think this would consist of? Is there a message here for us?
2. Does our maturing to "the full stature of Christ" imply some growing pains? Where is Christ most recognizable in your life? in your humility? gentleness? patience? in your caring for the poor and needy?
3. Jesus said signs would accompany those who believed. Most of us will probably not be picking up serpents with our hands or drinking deadly things without being harmed. What kinds of signs might you see today when you or someone else proclaims the Gospel?

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

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