

## Homily of Ascension of the Lord, Year B, 2024

**Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47:2-9; Ephesians 1:17-23; Mark 16:15-20**

The idea that Jesus was a political messiah remained in the minds of Jesus' disciples, even up till his last moments on earth. We read in the first reading, "When they had gathered together, they asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?'" I guess that Jesus' answer astonished them further. He replied to 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." The disciples might have wondered, "What's the man talking about? We are talking about the restoration of the kingdom of Israel, and he is talking about the Father and the Holy Spirit and witnessing. What's the connection?" Perhaps, that was why when Jesus disappeared into the cloud, the apostles stood in bewilderment and gazed intently at the sky until the angels came to minister to them. Then, they returned to Jerusalem and "went to the upper room ... [and] devoted themselves with one accord to prayer..." until the descent of the Holy Spirit on them (Acts 1:12-14).

What does the Ascension of the Lord mean to us?

First, Jesus ascended into heaven and is at the right hand of God interceding for us. In today's second reading, St. Paul writes, "... the exercise of [God's] great might, which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens..." (Ephesians 1:19-20). In Romans 8:34, he writes, "Christ who died, and better still, rose and is seated at the right hand of God, interceding for us?" Jesus himself says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The author of the Book of Hebrews writes, "Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). 1 John 2:1 tells us, "We have an intercessor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Just One."

Second, Jesus says, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may be where I am" (John 14:3). Preface of Ascension 1 says, "Mediator between God and man, judge of the world and Lord of hosts, he ascended, not to distance himself from our lowly state but that we, his members, might be confident of following where he, our Head and Founder, has gone before." We are, therefore, to be ready for his return and go with him. The Lord speaks of his coming in the Book of Revelations, "Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed" (Revelations 16:15). "Remains clothed" means to be prepared and to be ready.

Third, Jesus is no longer physically in the world. As his followers, we are to continue his good deeds by witnessing him to the world. He commands us in today's gospel reading, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Jesus remains in the world through us, who are his disciples, ambassadors, and witnesses. St. Teresa of Avila appeals to us: "Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on

earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours."

Jesus says, "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12). The works and greater works of Jesus are for us to become his body, his hands, his eyes, and his feet.

Fourth, when Jesus ascended into heaven, the apostles went to the upper room and devoted themselves with one accord to prayer until the descent of the Holy Spirit on them. We are invited to leave the noisy 'lobby' go into the quiet "upper room" of prayer, and pray for our personal new Pentecost. St. Paul prays for us in the second reading, "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, ..." (Ephesians 1:17-19).

The surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe is as Jesus promises in today's gospel, "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" (Mark 16:17-18). May these signs accompany us as we witness him in the world. Amen.

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