

Sunday, May 13, 2018

Ascension of the Lord

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Acts 1:1-11

Responsorial: Psalm 47:2-3, 6-9

2nd Reading: Ephesians 1:17-23

Gospel: Mark 16:15-20

The Ascension of Jesus Christ, *A Day of Great Joy and Celebration*

This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven . . . (Acts 1:11)

When we think of the ascension of Jesus, we often think about how marvelous it must have been to see him whisked away into the sky, heralded by angels and looked upon with awe by the apostles. We focus, in other words, on his act of ascending. But what is even more important is everything that happened after Jesus ascended. Let's take a look.

First, the ascended Lord took up his throne as King over all of creation. Paul tells us that Jesus is "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" (Ephesians 1:21). Everything must submit to his gospel of mercy and redemption.

Second, Jesus "has passed through the heavens" as a "high priest" who has been "tested in every way, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15-16). This means that we can now "approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace" for all our needs (4:16). We don't have to be afraid of him.

Third, by ascending, Jesus opened the door for the Holy Spirit. Just before he left, he promised, "You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). He promised that "the love of God" would be "poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5).

Finally, Jesus' ascension creates a longing in us for him to come back. At the ascension, the angel promised, "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" (Acts 1:11). It assures us that a time will come when sin, pain, and suffering will be no more. It promises us that Jesus will keep watch over us until that great and awesome day.

So rejoice today! Lift up your heart and lift up your eyes to Jesus, now enthroned in the heavens.

"Come, Lord Jesus, and fill me with your Spirit!"

(Many thanks to ***The Word Among Us*** (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. The first reading describes Jesus' resurrection appearances and words to his apostles during the forty days leading up to his ascension. This includes telling 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." After Jesus ascends, we hear these words spoken to the apostles from what are obviously angels: "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven."
 - Why do you think Jesus' emphasized to his apostles the importance of waiting to be "baptized with the Holy Spirit," that is, receiving "the promise of the Father"? Why is this also important to us as well?
 - How important to you is Jesus' ascension and the promise of his "return," that is, his second coming? How important should they be? Why?
2. The responsorial psalm provides a foreshadowing of the joy and celebration that may have occurred in heaven upon Jesus' ascension and his return: "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."
 - Why do you think the reaction in Heaven is described using such words as "shouts of joy," "trumpet blasts," and "Sing praise to God, sing praise; sing praise to our king, sing praise"?
 - The ascension of Jesus is also a day of great rejoicing and hope for us as we look forward to our own ascension into heaven. Why is this so?
 - Spend a minute or so in quiet reflection and try to imagine your first day(s) in Heaven. What do you think they will be like?
3. In the second reading, St. Paul prays a powerful prayer for the believers in Ephesus, and for us. His prayer begins with these words: "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." He continues his prayer by describing the resurrection and ascension of Jesus to the right hand of the Father.
 - Why do you think receiving a "Spirit of wisdom" results in "knowledge of him," and the enlightenment of our hearts results in knowing "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"?
 - Pray this St. Paul's prayer slowly and meditate on the words as you do. What does this prayer mean to you?
 - Would you consider praying parts of this prayer for family members and others? What do you think the fruits of doing this would be?
4. The Gospel reading ends with these words concerning Jesus' disciples: "they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs" (Mark 16:20).
 - How would you describe the importance of the "signs" that accompanied the disciples' preaching?
 - What about you? Do you believe the Lord wants to accompany your sharing of the Gospel with some types of signs? What would be some examples of these signs?
5. The meditation describes four things "that happened after Jesus ascended." These are as follows: 1) "the ascended Lord took up his throne as King over all of creation," 2) "Jesus 'has passed through the heavens' as a 'high priest' who has been 'tested in every way, yet without sin' (Hebrews 4:15-16)," 3) "by ascending, Jesus opened the door for the Holy Spirit," and 4) "Jesus' ascension creates a longing in us for him to come back." The meditation ends with these words: "So rejoice today! Lift up your heart and lift up your eyes to Jesus, now enthroned in the heavens."
 - Why is what happened to Jesus after he ascended also important to us as well?
 - Why is his ascension a cause for us to "rejoice today"?
6. Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for a deeper infilling of the Holy Spirit so that you can rejoice even more in what Jesus accomplished through his cross, and his resurrection and ascension into Heaven. Use the prayer below from the end of the mediation as the starting point.

"Come, Lord Jesus, and fill me with your Spirit!"

As posted on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal National Service Committee's website: www.nsc-chariscenter.org

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the **ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization** (www.christlife.org) and a member of the **National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal** (www.nsc-chariscenter.org). Maurice was also the founding executive director of the **National Fellowship of Catholic Men**, a former chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]