

Sunday, June 2, 2019

The Ascension of the Lord

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Acts 1:1-11

2nd Reading: Ephesians 1:17-23

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

Gospel: Luke 24:46-53

Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension, *The Source of Great Joy*

They . . . returned to Jerusalem with great joy. (Luke 24:52)

“Parting is such sweet sorrow,” as Juliet said to Romeo. Isn’t this the way many farewells go? Whether you’re sending a child off to make their way in the world or leaving a grandparent after a visit, saying good-bye can be bittersweet. The sweetness lies in your love for them; the bitterness, in leaving them.

Surprisingly, Jesus’ apostles do not weep at his ascension. Quite the opposite, Luke tells us that they returned to Jerusalem—the very place where Jesus was executed—“with great joy” (24:52). Such a display of exuberance can make the apostles appear unrelatable, almost superhuman. What about their deep human connection with Jesus? Didn’t they feel sad that after overcoming death, the greatest separation there is, Jesus decided to leave them anyway?

Of course they were sad. But more than anything else, they were filled with joy. They were confident that they would one day follow where Jesus had gone, and then they would be reunited forever. So their hope of seeing him again made their sorrow sweet.

This is the key to our joy as well. By faith, we know that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us in heaven. But it can still feel as if he has just moved on and left us on our own. One way to counter that sense of aloneness is to imagine Jesus in heaven right now. Think about how he has opened heaven to you, a place you could never reach on your own. Imagine him standing with his Father, your Father. Picture him preparing a place just for you. See the smile on his face as he thinks about opening the doors to your new home and welcoming you in.

Jesus has ascended to heaven and longs for all God’s children to join him. Until then, he never stops interceding for you and pouring out a constant stream of grace. All so that we can one day taste the sweetness of heaven.

“All praise to you, Jesus, for opening heaven for me!”

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. The first reading describes the instructions Jesus gave to his disciples before his ascension into heaven. This included these very important words: *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.”* The reading ends with these words from what are probably angels: *“This Jesus who has been taken up into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven.”*
 - What do you believe these words of Jesus mean, *“John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit?”* How do they apply to you?
 - The words at the end of the reading are an obvious reference to Jesus’ Second Coming. How important to you is the Second Coming of the Lord? How important should it be? Why?
2. In the responsorial psalm, we hear these words: *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.*
 - In what way does the responsorial psalm provide a foreshadowing of the joy and celebration that may have occurred in heaven upon Jesus’ ascension and return?
 - Take a minute or so to try to imagine your first day in Heaven. What do you think it will be like?
3. In the second reading, St. Paul prays a powerful prayer for the believers in Ephesus, and for us. It begins with these words: *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.*
 - What do the words of this prayer mean to you?
 - Take a moment to pray this prayer slowly. (You can personalize this prayer by changing “you” to “me”, “your hearts” to “my heart”, and “you may” to “I may”.) What impact did it have on you as you prayed it? Is it a prayer worth praying on a regular basis?
4. The Gospel reading begins with Jesus speaking these words to his disciples: *Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.* It ends with the ascension of Jesus: *Then he led them out as far as Bethany, raised his hands, and blessed them. As he blessed them he parted from them and was taken up to heaven. They did him homage and then returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple praising God.*
 - How would you describe how the opening words of Jesus to his disciples have been fulfilled in the last 2000 years? In what areas do these words need further fulfillment?
 - In what ways has the ascended Christ also empowered his Church to fulfill its mission so that *repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*
5. The meditation is a reflection on the words from the Gospel reading, which describes what happened to the disciples after the ascension of Jesus: *They . . . returned to Jerusalem with great joy* (Luke 24:52). It ends with these words: *“Jesus has ascended to heaven and longs for all God’s children to join him. Until then, he never stops interceding for you and pouring out a constant stream of grace. All so that we can one day taste the sweetness of heaven.”*
 - Why do you think his disciples *returned to Jerusalem with great joy*, after Jesus’ ascension?
 - Why is the Ascension of Jesus also a day of great rejoicing and hope for us as well, no matter what our current circumstances are?
 - Do you find it comforting, and amazing, that Jesus “never stops interceding for you and pouring out a constant stream of grace”? Why or why not?

Take some time now to pray and thank the Lord, ascended and exulted at the Father’s right hand, for being your advocate in Heaven. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.

“All praise to you, Jesus, for opening heaven for me!”

[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), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (www.nsc-chariscenter.org), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]