

Ascension of the Lord
May 17, 2015
St. Leo the Great, Oakland, CA
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Reading **1ACTS 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.”

Responsorial 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.

R. God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord.

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.

R. God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord.

For king of all the earth is God;
sing hymns of praise.

God reigns over the nations,
God sits upon his holy throne.

R. God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord.

Reading 2 [EPH 4:1-13](#)

Brothers and sisters,
I, a prisoner for the Lord,
urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received,
with all humility and gentleness, with patience,
bearing with one another through love,
striving to preserve the unity of the spirit
through the bond of peace:
one body and one Spirit,
as you were also called to the one hope of your call;
one Lord, one faith, one baptism;
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all.

But grace was given to each of us
according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Therefore, it says:

*He ascended on high and took prisoners captive;
he gave gifts to men.*

What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended
into the lower regions of the earth?

The one who descended is also the one who ascended
far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.

And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets,
others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers,
to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry,
for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith
and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature to manhood,
to the extent of the full stature of Christ.

Alleluia**MT 28:19A, 20B**

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Go and teach all nations, says the Lord;
I am with you always, until the end of the world.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel**MK 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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Homily

There is a story told that when Jesus returned to heaven after his death and resurrection, the Archangel Gabriel was surprised to see him back so soon. Thirty three years is not a long time, especially when you think about the importance and proportions of the task he had to do. 'Back so soon?' Gabriel said to Jesus. 'Well, I would have stayed longer but they crucified me,' Jesus replied. 'Oh, so they crucified you,' said Gabriel. 'That means you failed.' 'Not necessarily.' Said Jesus 'You see I called together a little group of disciples. They will carry on my work' "And what if they should fail?" asked Gabriel. "I have no other plans," Jesus answered. (story courtesy of Flor McCarthy SDB) That little dialogue helps to illustrate the two fold nature of our celebration today.

In modern parlance it is about bringing about closure. We have the life and ministry of Jesus recorded in the four gospel books and we need some kind of dramatic end to this extraordinary revelation by God. In the First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles we have the author saying that he is going to give an ordered account. Someone who is going to set the record straight. A disciple who is there as scribe to recount in an intelligible way how to reflect on the life of ministry of Jesus. And so St Luke in his gospel begins at the nativity and in the Acts of the Apostles ends in Rome. Scripture scholars tell us that there have been additions to the basic text but we have a fairly fully fleshed out account of who Jesus is and what he does. He is Jesus, whom we call the Christ, the anointed one, the Messiah. Became incarnate, became human, lived amongst us, suffered his passion and death and returned to the Father.

However today's reading also have another dimension. They leave the continuing of the building of the kingdom of God to his disciples and ultimately to us in the present day. We are his witnesses in the world. It is a daunting task but it is also privilege. When we witness to truth, justice love and peace, we are witnessing to Jesus.

The solemnity of the Ascension underscores a very important truth about life. That sometimes people can give us and do more for us when they are absent. There is a natural sadness among the followers of Jesus that he has gone. His absence helps to bring into clearer relief the essence of his ministry. The disciples get a fuller picture, a better understanding and appreciation of the nature and message of his ministry. Jesus honors the apostles (and now honors us) by entrusting them with the task of carrying on his mission. Firstly by their preaching so that they could share the Good News with those who had never heard it. Their was also the task of healing. Christianity is concerned not only with the soul but also with the body. Jesus wished his followers to bring health of mind and body. He gave them the power that would help them triumph over evil.

The most effective way to witness to Jesus is by living the Christian life. Our celebration today gives us the courage to face the challenge. We can draw encouragement from what Mother Teresa said: 'I don't pray for success; I pray that I may be a faithful witness.' We pray for each other that we may be faithful witnesses.

