

## REFLECTION FOR ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

**The first reading** gives an account of the event of the Ascension as recorded in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. First, Jesus instructed his apostles to *remain in Jerusalem and wait for the baptism by the Holy Spirit* so that they might become his *“witnesses to the ends of the earth”* by the power of the Holy Spirit. Then *a cloud took Jesus from the sight* of the disciples and two Heavenly messengers in white garments gave them the assurance of Jesus’ *“second coming”* or return in glory.

**The Refrain for today’s Responsorial Psalm (Ps 47)** suggests that by his Ascension, the risen Lord *“mounts his throne”* in glory.

**In the second reading**, Paul explains the theological meaning of Jesus’ exaltation, giving us the assurance that one day, we too will be ascending to Heavenly Glory, provided we fulfill the mission entrusted to us by the ascending Lord.

**Today’s Gospel** describes how Jesus ascended to Heaven after giving his final blessing and missionary command to his disciples. The command was to *proclaim the Good News to the whole creation,* *“to be his witnesses,”* and *“to make disciples of all nations.”* (Mt 28:16-20, Mk 16:15-20, Lk 24:46-53, Acts 1:1-11).

**1) We need to be proclaimers and evangelizers:** In today’s Gospel, Jesus gives his mission to all believers: *“Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.”* This mission is not given to a select few but to all believers. To be a Christian is to be a proclaimer and an evangelizer. There is a difference between preaching and proclaiming. *“We preach with words but we proclaim with our lives.”* As we celebrate the Lord’s return to His Father in Heaven – His Ascension — we are being commissioned to go forth and proclaim the Gospel of life and love, of hope and peace, by the witness of our lives. On this day of hope, encouragement and commissioning, let us renew our commitment to be true disciples everywhere we go, beginning with our family and our parish, *“living in a manner worthy of the call [we] have received.”* Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, says: *“All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the Faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. ... Indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love.”*

**2) We need to live a life of Christian Joy in the presence of the ascended Lord.** According to Luke, the disciples *“returned to Jerusalem with great joy.”* Apparently, Jesus’ exaltation and final blessing gave them, as it gives us, the assurance that, though absent, Jesus is still present, present even in the pain and sorrow we undergo. That is why St. Augustine assures us, *“Christ is now exalted above the Heavens, but he still suffers on earth all the pain that we, the members of his Body, have to bear. He showed this when He cried out from above: ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?’ and when He said: ‘I was hungry and you gave me*

food.' While in Heaven He is also with us; and while on earth we are with Him. He is here with us by His Divinity, His power and His love. We cannot be in Heaven, as He is on earth, by Divinity, but in Him, we can be there by love." (Sermon on the Ascension of the Lord, Mai" 98,1-7: PLS 2, 429-495) ***"With a spirit of wisdom and insight to know him clearly," (Eph 1:17), we can discover Christ's presence at every turn of our life's journeys to his final return at the end of time.***

**3) We have a teaching mission:** Jesus gave us lessons in Faith, Hope, Love, forgiveness, mercy, and Redemption. We cannot put these lessons on a shelf and ignore them. They stand before us in the person of Jesus. Although no longer visibly present in the world, He is present in his words. We must make his words real in our lives and in the lives of others. Christianity was meant to be a Faith in which Jesus' followers would help and care for others, just as Jesus had done, and in so doing, care for Jesus in them. But the spreading of the Good News to all nations is not a goal that can be attained by human might and craft. This is why Jesus promises to empower his messengers with His abiding presence and that of the Holy Spirit. The challenge of sharing the Good News with all mankind should, therefore, begin with our admission that we have often been arrogant and overbearing. We must learn to be humble and let the Holy Spirit lead the way.

**4) The ascended Jesus is our source of strength and encouragement:** Perhaps some of the nagging doubts, which inevitably accompany the journey of Faith, could be lessened by our meditating on the Ascension and its implications. When we are too far from Faith to pray on our own, let us remember that we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous, praying for us. When the trials of life feel too heavy to bear, we must remember that Christ will come again in glory, the same glory in which He arose from the tomb, the same glory in which He ascended, and the same glory in which He currently abides. Though our limited perception might find Jesus absent, our Lord is fully present, participating in every moment of our lives. By His Ascension, Christ has not deserted us but has made it possible for the Holy Spirit to enter all times and places. In this way it is possible for each of us to be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit into agents or instruments of Christ. We are enlivened, and our actions become animated in a new way by the Holy Spirit as we serve the God we love. Each of us, particularly, each ministerial priest, has become "another Christ" (*alter Christus*) in the world.

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