

THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

LECTIONARY #58

READING I Acts of the Apostles 1:1-11

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

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?"

Theophilus = thee-AWF-uh-luhs
Proclaim in an informative tone.

READING I This reading forms a transition between Luke's two-part work, the Gospel, which deals with Jesus' life, death, and Resurrection, and the Acts of the Apostles, which shows how Jesus' work is carried on by those who believe in him, by the Church. Their mission is to bring the Lord to people and in places that he could not reach while in the flesh. Luke addresses his readers as Theophilus, a lofty title which means "friend of God" and reminds readers of the close relationship that God offers to them through Jesus.

Crucial to the continuation of Jesus' mission on earth is the apostle's conviction that he was truly raised from the dead. Hence the many proofs that he gave them for forty days after his Resurrection, forty being a symbolic number which represents the amount of time required to accomplish a divine project. During this time, Jesus focused his teaching on the Kingdom of God. That the apostles failed to grasp the spiritual nature of this kingdom is shown by their question about Jesus' restoration of Israel. He sidesteps the issue by telling them, basi-

cally, that no one can know, nor do they need to know the details of divine plans.

God's friends focus, rather, on their mission to be Jesus' witnesses, a task that entails more than simply passing on the facts of his life, death, and Resurrection. To become *credible* witnesses, they must re-pattern their lives on that of their risen Lord. And the changes involved in this conformation require the powerful aid of the Holy Spirit.

Luke insists that the same Spirit who led Jesus in the Gospel will orchestrate the work of his witnesses in Acts. For example,

Pause before Jesus speaks and proclaim in a clear and direct voice. Use good eye contact.

Judea = joo-DEE-uh

Calmly ask the question.

Galilee = GAL-ih-lee

For meditation and context:

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 Psalm 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9 (6)

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

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.

For king of all the earth is God;
sing hymns of praise.
God reigns over the nations,
God sits upon his holy throne.

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.

the Spirit descends on Jesus when he is baptized by John (Luke 3:22), leads him into the desert for forty days to be tempted by the devil, and afterward to Galilee where he begins his public ministry (Luke 4:1, 14). And in Acts, it leads and works through the first generation of believers: Peter (Acts 4:8); Philip (Acts 8:29); Saul/Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:2-4); Paul and Timothy (Acts 16); and others. And today, the same Spirit guides and works through all the baptized.

READING II

Though the opening verses of this letter are addressed

to the Ephesians, its content indicates that it was written for the universal Church. Our reading is, in Greek, a one-sentence prayer of Paul for "the saints," for believers past and present. Though Paul earlier praised their exemplary faith in the Lord and their love for each other, he now prays that the experience of God working in them may be deepened.

To this end, he asks that God give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Both terms deal with the discovery of the ever-present and always active God in the human realm. Wisdom, in the Old

Testament writings, is drawn from the observation of and reflection on human and animal life and all creation. Under later Hellenistic influence, wisdom was identified with the all-pervasive and all-powerful spirit at work in creation. "Revelation" is the consequence of an unveiling, the drawing back of a curtain to disclose the subtle, often missed workings of the invisible God on earth. In short, the spirit of wisdom and revelation will give believers insight into how God is at work in their midst. Paul prays that as the minds of believers, "the eyes of their hearts," are opened and expanded by this

READING II Ephesians 1:17–23

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

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,
in accord with the exercise of his **great might**,
 which he worked **in Christ**,
raising him from the dead
 and **seating** him at his **right** hand in the heavens,
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.

And he put **all things beneath** his feet
 and gave him **as head** over **all things** to the church,
 which is **his body**,
 the **fullness** of the one who **fills all things** in every way.

Proclaim St. Paul's words with enthusiasm
 and energy. Take your time and speak clearly.

Slowly say this line.

Connect with the assembly by using good
 eye contact.

knowledge they might also grasp the hope to which they are called and appreciate the bounty of what they already share with all believers in Christ.

The last five verses of Paul's prayer dwell on the unimaginable divine power that God wields for believers. It surpasses all physical and spiritual powers including ones that might be discovered or "named" in the future. It is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at God's right hand. Paul uses language found in Psalm 110:1 to describe the risen Lord's new position as God's king: "Sit at

my right hand, while I make your enemies your footstool." This decree was read when an Israelite king ascended his throne and began his reign as God's messiah or "anointed one," a title which is translated in Greek as "christos." The image of Israel's enemies as the royal footstool reflects a custom from the biblical world wherein a king proclaims his dominance by ceremonially placing his foot on the neck of a vanquished prostrate enemy.

GOSPEL

Matthew places Jesus' last post-Resurrection appear-

ance on a mountain in Galilee. In this Gospel, insights into Jesus' divine nature and his access to the spiritual realm are revealed on mountains. He goes to pray to be with his Father, on a mountain (14:23). On a "very high" mountain, he resists the lure of temporal kingdoms offered by the devil (4:5–8). Like God giving divine teaching to Moses on Mount Sinai, Jesus teaches potential followers in the Sermon on Mount. His divinity shines through his human form when he is transfigured (Matthew 17:9). His prayer or conversation