

# 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

A reading that recounts the Ascension of Jesus, along with some of Jesus' last words to the disciples before he departs for heaven. The reading is dramatic and visionary. You will only need to proclaim it with care for its power to come through.

“The day he was taken up”: the Ascension. The vertical direction is important.

This question allows Jesus to provide the disciples specific details of their task as well as advice before he departs.

### READING I

Acts opens with the announcement that this book is intended to be a sequel to the first correspondence addressed to Theophilus, which was the Gospel of Luke (see Luke 1:1-4). While the Gospel of Luke was designed to tell the story Jesus' life and ministry during his time on earth, Acts turns to the mission bestowed upon the apostles to witness to Jesus' resurrection and to make believers of all the nations. Luke's Gospel ends with an extremely brief depiction of Jesus' ascension. Now in Acts, Luke provides a much more detailed account

of what took place between the time of Jesus' death and resurrection and his ascension into heaven.

Acts tells us that the apostles were instructed to remain together in Jerusalem for several days before they would be “baptized with the Holy Spirit.” The risen Lord diligently prepares his followers for the work of continuing his mission. He offers them “many proofs” during the forty days following his resurrection, enlightening them about the kingdom of God. Yet Acts portrays the apostles as failing to truly understand the Lord's teaching, as they

question him on the possibility of restoring the kingdom of Israel rather than God's kingdom. Jesus gently corrects them and refocuses their vision on the kingdom, which the arrival of the Spirit will enable them to help build up. Through the instructions of the resurrected Jesus, Luke tells us that the mission will be rooted in Jerusalem and Judea, will go out to the partially Jewish region of Samaria, and will extend even beyond “to the ends of the earth.” This order guides the growth and mission of the Church in the overall scheme of Acts.

Emphasize "witnesses." Witnessing is essential to discipleship.

Judea = joo-DEE-uh

Samaria = suh-MAYR-ee-uh

The reading concludes with a vision of two angelic beings. Give their speech that follows emphasis by slowing your pace ever so slightly.

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 account of Jesus' ascension in Acts concludes with his being "lifted up" in the midst of a cloud with the apostles looking on. The dramatic portrayal is meant to bring to an end the earthly work of Jesus so that the ministry may begin anew under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and through the work of the disciples. Luke includes "two men dressed in white garments" who observe the apostles' reaction and provide a commentary on Jesus' ascent into heaven. Keeping the movement of Jesus into heaven at the ascension in context of his larger mission, they inform the apostles that Jesus

will someday return just as he departed (the parousia). It is a call to action for the apostles and there is an urgency with which they are to testify to the glorified Lord.

**READING II**

The Letter to the Ephesians is an encouragement to Christian communities to understand themselves as united with Christ and in Christ so that they might continue his work. In the passage we hear today, the author offers a prayer for the community for their further enlightenment in Christ. First, he asks that the Ephesians may be given the

wisdom to come to know the mystery of God. Next, the prayer asks that this knowledge include an understanding of the "hope" of what it means to belong to Christ, namely, to be counted among the "holy ones," and those destined to inherit the "riches of glory."

The prayer for the Church in Ephesus continues by describing the mighty power of God. Not only did God raise Jesus from the dead, but he also seated him "at his right hand" to glorify him, allowing him to reign over every imaginable power. Far mightier than "every principality, authority,

Ephesians = ee-FEE-zhuhnz

An exhortatory reading, filled with high-hearted blessings.

The first blessing comes from God to the people of Ephesus.

The second blessing comes from Paul to the people of Ephesus, including knowledge, hope, and the riches of glory. Give each aspect of this blessing its due by emphasizing it slightly.

These are the traditional names of some of the angelic powers.

Paul concludes by invoking the power of Jesus himself.

## 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.

power, and dominion," all things will be subjected to the power of Christ for all eternity. Christ's authority is complete and universal.

The prayer concludes with a further mention that God subjects "all things" to the reign of Christ, including, and perhaps most especially, the Church. In keeping with other Pauline epistles, the Church is described as a body, with Christ as its head (see Colossians 1:18 and Romans 12:4–8). The head is understood as giving direction to the body. Because the body enacts the command of the head, the reign of Christ is

handed on to the Church to be exercised in the world. With the Church filled with "a spirit of wisdom and revelation" and with Christ as its head, the Christian community is meant to reveal the authority of the glorified Lord, cooperating with his work.

**GOSPEL** The setting for Jesus' ascension in Matthew is very similar to the one found in the evangelist's rendering of the transfiguration in chapter 17. There Jesus leads Peter, James, and John up a mountain where he is transfigured, glorified by the voice of God, and

then proceeds to tell the disciples about his resurrection from the dead. Now, in the final verses of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus orders the eleven to a mountain in Galilee where he reminds them of his divine authority and commissions them to go "make disciples of all nations."

An important detail of this short passage is the reaction of the disciples when they discover Jesus on this mountain. Matthew states that "they worshiped, but they doubted." Unlike Mark's account of the Gospel, in which there are several appearances of the risen Lord prior to his

This reading comes from the concluding words of Matthew's Gospel. Therefore, they have a valedictory quality to them.

Matthew's Gospel concludes with these words of Jesus, which function as a concise and moving summation of his teachings. He is encouraging his disciples while also saying farewell to them.

This last statement in light of Jesus' imminent departure is especially poignant.

## GOSPEL Matthew 28:16–20

### A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

The **eleven disciples** went to **Galilee**,  
to the **mountain** to which **Jesus** had **ordered** them.  
When they **saw** him, they **worshiped**, but they **doubted**.  
Then **Jesus** **approached** and **said** to them,  
"All power in **heaven** and on **earth** has been **given** to me.  
**Go**, therefore, and make **disciples** of all **nations**,  
**baptizing** them in the name of the **Father**,  
and of the **Son**, and of the **Holy Spirit**,  
**teaching** them to observe **all** that I have **commanded** you.  
And **behold**, I am with you **always**, until the **end** of the **age**."

ascension (see Mark 16:9–14), the resurrected Lord in Matthew appears only to the women at the tomb before he meets the eleven in Galilee. Thus, the doubt they experience should not surprise us, as this is their first encounter with the risen Jesus. Their act of worship is meant to override their doubt.

After the Lord reveals the authority given to him from above, his commissioning of the apostles contains two components that go into the making of disciples. First, they are commanded to baptize in the name of the triune God—Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit. No longer is baptism simply about immersion into the kingdom and repentance (as John the Baptist's baptism was; see Matthew 3:11), but now it is to unite the recipient with God. The second important aspect of the apostles' mission to "all nations" is that they are to teach all that Jesus has handed on to them. Thus, baptism is inseparable from the preaching of the Gospel. In word and sacrament, Jesus remains with the church "until the end of the age." S.W.