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21 May 2023

Ascension of the Lord

Reflection by Joe Tedesco

Introduction

Today we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord. It remembers the end of Jesus' earthly ministry as the Lord Christ takes his place at 'God's right hand'. We are also celebrating the beginning of our call to manifest Christ as a Church in new ways through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you brought all things to fulfilment. Lord have mercy.

You gift us with the Spirit. Christ have mercy.

You share all authority in heaven and on earth. Lord have mercy.

First Reading

Acts 1:1-11

The Acts of the Apostles opens with Jesus' final instructions; be ready to receive the Holy Spirit which empowers you to witness Christ to the whole world.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 46(47):2-3, 6-9

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

Today's psalm praises the universal dominion of God; The Lord is not only the God of a select people, but of the whole world.

Second Reading

Ephesians 1:17-23

The reading from Ephesians attests that Christ, through his descending into death and ascension into heaven, has supreme sovereignty over all creation. Through faith and love, we come to experience this truth and find our place in Christ.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 28:16-20

The final scene in Matthew's gospel focusses less on Jesus' departing and more on instructions for Christ's followers. They are to go to 'all the nations' and draw people into Christ.

Reflection

The central scriptural narrative on which today's feast is based is taken from Acts and presents a somewhat intriguing picture. Jesus has given his final instructions and then is experienced as rising into the heavens in a glorious epiphanic moment. The gathered disciples then stand there gaping at an empty sky. The final act in Jesus' earthly ministry has occurred, and it seems we have that moment of 'now what'?

For a brief moment at least, the scene captures an often experienced human occurrence. We might call it the afterglow or, in more negative tones, a comedown or perhaps reality check. It is the feeling that one gets when a tremendous impactful experience has come to an end. For example, when we have come to the end of a great project that we may have been working on, or when we attend the graduation for ourselves or of a loved one, or after a wedding. Perhaps when we've come to the conclusion of a much anticipated concert or sporting event. Or when we've been on a 'once in a lifetime' holiday or significant religious retreat. When it comes time for those wonderful experiences to end, there are those moments afterward where we are left with ourselves recognising that, whatever that special event or experience was, it is quickly becoming an historical memory. We have that mix of joy at having experienced the meaningful event, but sadness that it is over and we have to 'move on'.

And we are left with questions. Is this experience for a moment, or does it change things going forward? What changes now? What do we do now? Perhaps that is something of what is being expressed in the dumfounded stare at the empty sky among the followers of Christ. They have gone through the roller-coaster ride of encountering, befriending and growing among themselves with Christ. They have had that experience ripped apart with the crucifixion, but have now encountered the risen Christ. It is surely a high point of their lives. But, even though Christ is risen, the time for encounter as they have known it has come to an end. A glorious end to be sure, but it is over. What now?

We are given an answer in part by Jesus in both Acts and the Gospel reading – and it applies to us as much as it did to those original apostles. Jesus may not be present in the same way he was in his earthly ministry, but his presence is available through the Holy Spirit 'until the end of time', and we are to 'wait for the promises of the Father' and heed the call to go out into the world and bring people into the family of Christ. To encounter, experience, to be touched by the Holy Spirit, and then bring this to others. This is the fundamental call for what we are to do.

It is telling that the Ascension scene appears at the beginning of Acts. The Ascension reads like an end to the story, and the feast name itself seems to put the emphasis

there, but it really is a celebration of beginnings. It is the story of Jesus going 'to the Father' not as a departure, but as a fore-runner, what St. Paul calls 'the first fruits' that we all will enjoy (cf. 1 Cor 15:20). So, what the experience of Christ was, was incredible, but the place where Christ is to be found now, is among us to be sure, but is calling us forward; not simply what was, but what will be.

We all experience high points. We would hopefully have some experience of highpoints with Christ in our personal lives and in our Church too. Times of feeling confident in our faith, assured of God's presence and positive in our community. But nothing stays still. Perhaps one lesson of the Ascension is recognising that Christ never really 'goes away' but does 'go ahead'. This indicates our response and our destiny which is, 'to follow'. This very point reflects the fundamental truth of existence; that we cannot stay still. To cling entirely to past experiences is to stay still. But life is dynamic, and we too may have felt Jesus pulling away to go ahead of us. Not away all together, but not quite there as we would like either.

Part of this feast is recognising the loss we feel of times gone past. Whether it is in our personal experience of faith or even collectively, as a Church. It is human nature to want to cling to what has gone before and remain there. In our own way, to stand there gawking at an empty sky. The feast of the Ascension reminds us that Jesus is always with us, but is more fully ahead of us, calling us forward. We may not always feel the assuredness of the presence of Christ, of the truth and love of God, but it is there for us nonetheless as we wait on the Holy Spirit. With it, we can move forward rather than cling to that which is behind us.

Thus, today's feast is also a tremendous celebration of all that we can be, of all that God calls us to be as individuals and as a community of Christ. Jesus departed so that the Lord's presence would become manifest in the community itself. Empowered by the Spirit, those first disciples of Christ went forth into the world and we today are the legacy of those beginnings. However, the story continues. Like those first followers, we draw on what has gone before, but we are still called forward and know that is exactly where Jesus wants us to go, confident that, in the Spirit, we are given all we need for the journey.



*I will come back to you and
your hearts will rejoice.*

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

Jesus promises us that when we receive the Holy Spirit, we shall be his disciples to the ends of the earth. Let us pray with hope and faith for the grace to respond courageously to this challenge.

Petitions

We pray for the leaders of our Church, that they may be given the strength and courage to lead us in the front line of the current spiritual, social, moral and economic battles that we face.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for our Church in Australia, that all of us may work prayerfully towards the Synod in whatever capacity we are able to be involved.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the leaders of our country, that they may believe in goodness and proclaim it with honesty and truth in all that they do.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the gift of spiritual alertness, that we may always be aware of God's presence in our lives and in the lives of others.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those who are sick and particularly those who suffer mental illness. Through the care of those around them and those in medical services, may they be granted improved health.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for our community gathered around this table of remembrance. May we remain open to the Spirit and to the knowledge that Christ will be with us for all time.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those who have died recently and those whose anniversaries occur at this time. May they have eternal rest and peace. May those who grieve be strengthened through the love and care of those around them.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

Father, we know that you will grant all these needs as you are the source of all mercy and love. We make our prayer in the name of your son, Jesus Christ Our Lord, and through the power of the Spirit.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

The Ascension of the Lord, Year A (21 May 2023)

Title	AOV1	AOV2	CWB	CWBII	GA
A hymn of glory let us sing!				372	
Alleluia! Sing to Jesus	191		619	449	371
Be not afraid	114			653	449
Christ is the king! O friends rejoice			641	398	389
Christ our Lord, he gives life abundant			642		
Christ, our Lord, the Prince of ages			644	399	
Christians, lift up your hearts			651	355	
Forth in the peace of Christ we go			681	489	495
Glorious in majesty				374	
Hail Redeemer, king divine			703	400	
Hail the day that sees him rise				375	
Holy God, we praise your name		129	710	504	411
Let the earth rejoice and sing			731	376	
Lord, you give the great commission				308	313
O Christ, the great foundation				565	483
Rejoice the Lord is king			799	377	
The Church of Christ, in every age			818	613	
The fullness of God		62			
The Church's one foundation			819	614	484

Title	AOVNG	S&S1	S&S2
Alleluia! Sing to Jesus		97	
God mounts his throne			256
I send you out	75		
My witness you'll be	98		
Shouts of joy		65	

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 46: *God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord./Alleluia!*

	CWB	GA	JOBA	LPA	PM
Psalm 46	311	39	pg. 49	pg. 62	pg. 38

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Feel the power (TCS) [Gathering]

Hearts on fire (Vs 2 & 3) (SHOF) [Recessional]

Till the end of time (TT/SYJ) [Recessional]