

Ascension of the Lord, Year C, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for the session, read all the readings.

Acts 1:1-11

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

Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:19-23 [or Ephesians 1:17-23]

Luke 24:46-53

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading which appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

The Word In Liturgy

The earliest scriptural traditions did not distinguish the Resurrection of Jesus and his Ascension as two separate events. It is in the later Gospel accounts—those of Luke and John—that we find these two dimensions of the Paschal Mystery most clearly described as separate chronological events. So, too, in the liturgical year, it was not until the fourth and fifth centuries that a separate Feast of the Ascension, celebrated forty days after the Resurrection in accord with Luke's chronology in Acts, became commonplace.

All three years of the lectionary cycle use today's reading from Acts to introduce the notion of Christ's Ascension. Luke's description is a carefully constructed narrative, meant to be understood in light of the parallel beginning of his Gospel (compare Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-2), as well as the many key themes found here and woven throughout his two-volume work. The Gospel's description of John's baptism in chapter 3 is alluded to in this passage as being surpassed by the disciples' forthcoming baptism with the Holy Spirit; Jesus' forty days (always a symbolic number in Luke) in the desert are balanced here by mention of the forty days during which he appeared to the disciples after his Resurrection; the conclusion of the Gospel, in which Jesus commands the disciples to be his witnesses to all nations, is matched here with a similar command in virtually identical language. It is clear that the Ascension, for Luke, is much more a proclamation of theological truth than mere historical remembrance.

The thrust of that proclamation is captured effectively in the psalm refrain ("God mounts his
Ascension of the Lord, Year C, Catechist



a Kendall Hunt Company

Ascension of the Lord, Year C, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary

throne to shouts of joy; a blare of trumpets to the Lord.”). Psalm 47 is considered by scholars to be one of the so-called “enthronement psalms,” presumably sung at an annual celebration marking Yahweh’s kingship, which was symbolized in the reign of Israel’s sovereign.

Today’s reading from Ephesians reflects the sort of evolved theological understanding of the Ascension which underlies Luke’s deceptively simple description. Scholars suspect that the Pauline disciple who penned this letter very likely may have borrowed the opening prayer, from which our reading is taken, from an early liturgical hymn. The mention of Christ as head of the Church recalls Paul’s body metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12, but here the church is also called the “fullness” of Christ.

The Gospel reading reiterates a number of important Lucan themes: that the Messiah had to suffer (cf. the similar explanation is given to the disciples on the road to Emmaus), and that the disciples are to be witnesses to the ends of the earth, but beginning their mission from Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the place where the Paschal Mystery of Jesus death, Resurrection and gift of the Holy Spirit all occur. This description of the Ascension is clearly earlier and less developed than the account in the Acts which follows.

Catholic Doctrine



“He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father” (Nicene Creed)

Our Catholic belief in the Ascension could appear as nothing more than an historical remembrance of Jesus’ final departure from this earthly existence. As such, its relevance to our lives today might seem marginal at best. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In fact, the Ascension is a crucial dimension of the saving plan of God which we refer to as the Paschal Mystery. Theologically, the Ascension is expressive of our conviction that Christ’s death has saving ramifications for us. Moreover, it explains how it is that we can and must experience Christ’s presence to and in the church in a totally new way in the post-resurrection era.