

Ascension of the Lord, Year A, Catechist

Submitted by lectionaryadmin on Wed, 06/15/2016 - 20:00

Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session read all the readings.

Acts 1:1-11

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

Ephesians 1:17-23

Matthew 28:16-20

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages 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.

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 & 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 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.

The gospel reading from Matthew, known in the tradition as "the great commission," shows Jesus sending his followers out to preach and baptize in the name of the Trinity. The scope of their mission is universal. They are sent to "all nations," not only to Israel. At the opening of the passage, Jesus appears as Lord of the universe. The very sight of him dispels the last lingering doubts of his followers. He speaks in regal fashion, with a word of command. Yet his promise to remain with them always affirms the intimacy of the disciples with their Lord. On a mountaintop, with all the world and the ages before them, the last words of Jesus recall the promise made at his birth (Matthew 1:23): ". . . they shall call him Emmanuel, a name which means 'God is with us.'"



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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 a 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 further 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.

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