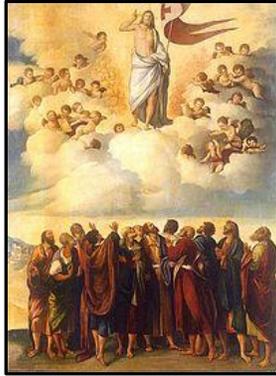


***ctkAlive!* Scripture Study**
Easter Season 2020—A Cycle Readings
Feast of the Ascension

“Why do you stand here looking up at the sky?”



The [Ascension](#), by [Dosso Dossi](#), (16th c.)
*In artworks, many Ascension scenes have
an upper (heavenly) and a lower (earthly) part.*

Note: *For your convenience and to broaden your benefit from this and all sessions in this series, we have added links to books, authors, and other references mentioned in the text.*

Caution: *Links to the internet are like rabbits dashing across a hunter’s path. Instinct says, “Leave the reflection and chase after that link!” Instead, we suggest waiting until you have followed the entire reflection. Then take all the time you wish to follow these interesting and educational links.*

Opening Prayer

(adapted for use here)

O God of earth and sky,
Jesus came among us . . . to raise us up to heaven,
we now recall his departure from us at Jerusalem . . . to be in *all* places.
Though he is hidden from our sight . . .
enable us to abide in him by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit,
and fill your whole creation with his mercy and grace . . .
Amen.

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theophilus_\(biblical\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theophilus_(biblical))

Feast of the Ascension Themes

Let’s look at some key statements in the Ascension Day readings we will be reflecting on.

Acts—*"In the first part of my work, [Theophilus](#) . . .*

The identity of this unspecified person is not essential to any Christian's faith. Still, over the centuries scholars have played with (argued over) the name and this lofty person Luke addresses in Acts—and also at the beginning of his gospel (Luke 1:3-4) *"After I, myself, had carefully gone over the whole story from the beginning, it seemed right for me to give you, Theophilus, an orderly account, so that your Excellency may know the truth of all you have been taught."*

(If you are interested in pursuing the question of the identity of Theophilus, follow the link above.)

" . . . when he had been eating with them" . . .

This raises the age-old—unanswerable—question of the nature of Jesus' post-Resurrection body. Again, we find ourselves involved in the nature of his mortal body—and ours.

(If you wish to pursue this, you can go on the web, starting with [Catholic Answers](#).)

" . . . "wait for the fulfillment of the Father's promise . . . you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit within a few days . . . "

It's that same "Spirit-baptism" that the Catholics and Christians worldwide celebrate this week.

" . . . "why do you stand here looking up at the sky?"

This is the real, personal challenge for each of us. Clearly, the two men dressed in white—angels?—understood human nature's temptation to revel in our discoveries . . . and keep them to ourselves. This sort of "personal faith" cannot be the Christian norm. From day one, Jesus "ordains" us to be missionary disciples—whatever our life circumstances.

Psalm 47—*"God reigns from his holy throne. The leaders of the nations rally, together with the people of the God of Abraham. For in his hands are the great of the earth, God reigns far above."*

Sadly, we don't see enough of this kind of unity among world leadership. Most of us have lived our 20th and 21st century lives with never-ending wars being waged over large swaths of our planet.

Ephesians 1—*"May he enlighten your inner vision, that you may appreciate the things we hope for . . . God put all things under the feet of Christ and set him above all things, as head of the church, which is his body, the fullness of him, who fills all in all."*

St. Paul invites us to perform a self-examination of our "inner vision."

Matthew 28—*"As for the eleven disciples . . . Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations . . . Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations."*

Jesus lost one out of twelve of his handpicked core team. The truth for all of us is

this: we carry our faith in “[earthen vessels](#).” (← Listen to composer John Foley’s familiar prayer/song.)

First Reading: From the Acts of the Apostles (1:1-11)

Before reading this week’s Scriptures, we urge you to watch this 7-minute video, [“Why the Ascension Matters”](#) by [Bishop Robert Barron](#), Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles.

“In the first part of my work, Theophilus, I wrote of all that Jesus did and taught, from the beginning until the day when he ascended to heaven. But first, he had instructed, through the Holy Spirit, the apostles he had chosen.

“After his passion, he presented himself to them, giving many signs, that he was alive; over a period of forty days he appeared to them and taught them concerning the kingdom of God.

“Once, when he had been eating with them, he told them, ‘Do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the fulfillment of the Father’s promise about which I have spoken to you: John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit within a few days.’

“When they had come together, they asked him, ‘Is it now that you will restore the kingdom of Israel?’

“And he answered, ‘It is not for you to know the time and the steps that the Father has fixed 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, even to the ends of the earth.’

“After Jesus said this, he was taken up before their eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight. While they were still looking up to heaven, where he went, suddenly, two men dressed in white stood beside them and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up at the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will return in the same way as you have seen him go there.’”

Personal Reflection

So, where did Jesus’ disciples go from there? Courageously out to the streets? No, they returned to their safe shelter-in-place!

Over the centuries Catholics have let reception of this sacrament range from infant baptisms to 12 yrs. old, to high school. Some delay Confirmation until adulthood, when they have a clearer understanding of its meaning and significance in their adult lives.

— *How do I understand what the sacrament of Confirmation really is and what it means (other than a box to check in a “good” Catholic’s life)?*

— *In my opinion, what is the optimum age or time in life to receive the sacrament of Confirmation? Why?*

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up at the sky?”

— *Do I believe the Ascension was a men-only event, as portrayed in Dosso Dossi's * Renaissance masterpiece? If not, what image do I have of this world-changing event? How would I portray it on canvas or in a poem or essay?*

* Dosso Dossi is a pseudonym. His real name was Giovanni di Niccolò de Luteri.

Antiphonal Psalm (47)

Dedication: To God, king of the world.

*Ant.: God mounts his throne to shouts of joy,
a blaze of trumpets for the Lord.*

Clap your hands, all you peoples;
acclaim God with shouts of joy.
For Yahweh, the Most High, is to be feared;
he is a great king all over the earth.
He brings people under our dominion
and puts nations under our feet.
He chose our inheritance for us—
the pride of Jacob whom he loves!

*Ant.: God mounts his throne to shouts of joy,
a blaze of trumpets for the Lord.*

God ascends amid joyful shouts,
Yahweh amid trumpet blasts.
Sing praises to God, sing praises!
Sing praises to our King, sing praises!
God is King of all the earth;
sing to him a hymn of praise.

*Ant.: God mounts his throne to shouts of joy,
a blaze of trumpets for the Lord.*

The nations,
God reigns from his holy Throne for God now rules over.
The leaders of the nations rally,
together with the people of the God of Abraham.
For in his hands are the great of the earth,
God reigns far above.

*Ant.: God mounts his throne to shouts of joy,
a blaze of trumpets for the Lord.*

Personal Reflection

Catholic Pastoral Bible (CPB) Commentary on Psalm 47:

“Your kingdom come,’ we pray, and yet God’s kingdom has already come. But we are thinking of *our own acceptance* of it, our practical acknowledgment of God’s sovereignty. However, there is always comfort in throwing responsibility on God as nations, their king and military leader once did. Hence the note of joy in this psalm, and God ‘goes up’ to the sound of it. No doubt, this refers to the procession with the Ark, brought up the Temple hill.

“For us there is another ‘ascension.’ The glorified body of Christ has thrown off the chains of place and time and has power to lead us always and everywhere. This is surely a psalm for the feast of the Ascension. As Christians, we have added reasons to rejoice because of the Ascension of our Lord and His promise to take us to Him.”

This psalm portrays a celebration resembling that of an old-time tent revival. As beautiful as our post-Vatican II liturgies are, Catholics—especially in the western world—still prefer a more timid (quieter) celebration of our Mass.

— *How do I explain my own preference for mostly silent liturgies?*

Those who have taken part in Catholic, Spirit-moved prayer gatherings and Masses know that this Scripture-based form of prayer can have a powerful effect on one’s prayer life.

— *If encouraged by the celebrant to “cut loose” with my prayer/worship at Mass, what would I do? How comfortable would I be?*

Second Reading: From the Letter to the Ephesians (1: 17-23)

“May the God of Christ Jesus our Lord, the Father of glory, reveal himself to you, and give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation, that you may know him. May he enlighten your *inner vision*, that you may appreciate the things we hope for, since we were called by God. May you know how great is the inheritance, the glory, God sets apart for his saints; may you understand, with what extraordinary power, he acts in favor of us who believe. He revealed his almighty power in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and had him sit at his right hand in heaven, far above all rule, power, authority, dominion, or any other supernatural force that could be named, not only in this world, but in the world to come as well. Thus has God put all things under the feet of Christ and set him above all things, as head of the church, which is his body, the fullness of him, who fills all in all.”

Personal Reflection

— *What is it in the Scriptures and/or my Catholic faith that still bothers me? What is still lacking in my commitment? How might the Risen Christ further enlighten my “inner vision”?*

— *If I let the Lord take me to a deeper place in my faith and commitment to him, what might He ask of me that I am not yet giving? Is that something I to dare pray for?*

— *How frightening does it feel for me to open that next closed door to my heart? What am I afraid of?*

Proclamation from the Gospel of Matthew (28: 16-20)

“As for the eleven disciples, they went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Jesus, they bowed before him, although some doubted.

“All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. I am with you always, even to the end of the world.”

Personal Reflection

“Jesus sent his apostles to evangelize the world. The last apparition is related in a quite simple way: no sudden appearance, no fear—no physical demonstration of the reality of Jesus. What is important are the words of Jesus. . . . ‘Although some doubted’ (v. 17)” With this, Matthew sums up the last apparition of Jesus. Not all the disciples of Jesus believed so quickly in the resurrection of Jesus. . . . The same holds true today.”— CPB commentary on Matthew 28: 16-20

— *“Go . . . make disciples of all nations.” When I arrive at the Pearly Gates, what real-life examples of “evangelization” will I bring with me? Or, will I have kept my faith safely intact but . . . all to myself?*

— *“although some doubted” We all have questions about living a Jesus-focused life, e.g., “is-it-all-real” . . . or is there “_____ (fill in with your doubts/questions)_____?”*

Even if I was baptized as an infant, there are moments in life when each of us ratifies—or rejects—our childhood faith, trading it for a mature, adult faith.

— *“When did that moment occur in my life? Can I date it and/or cite the occasion or event? How did it change me? Have I have remained true to that gifted, personal (not parental) moment of total commitment to—or rejection—of the faith of my youth?*

— *How am I able to remain firm in my faith, knowing that my Church, its leaders, its members—and myself—are all fragile “earthen vessels”?*

Journaling Prompts

Take some time to write about the insights gained from reflecting on the Ascension Sunday readings. Suggested prompts:

— *What is the first thought that comes to mind?*

We can't just be “takers” of God's good gifts. We need to be “givers,” too.

— *How do I respond to what I've discovered in today's Scriptures? What difference will these insights make in how I think and live—and give back—during the week ahead?*

Questions

Feel free to send any questions or comments you might have to ctkAlive@ctkph.org

Preview of Next Session Pentecost Sunday

Acts 2: 1-11—“Suddenly, out of the sky came a sound, like a strong rushing wind . . . there appeared tongues of fire. . . .”

Psalms 104—“Praise Yahweh, my soul! Clothed in majesty and splendor; O Yahweh, my God, how great you are!”

I Corinthians 12: 3-7, 12-13—“All of us, whether Jew or Greek, slaves or free, have been baptized in one spirit, to form one body, and all of us have been given to drink from the one Spirit.”

John 20: 19-23—“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

For Your Inspirational Viewing/Listening

[“The Grand Miracle”](#) by C.S. Lewis + Doodle (Part 1)
(15-minute “mind-blowing” talk+doodle in which Lewis pulls human history together in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus)

Composer/singer John Foley's [“earthen vessels.”](#)
([John Foley](#) was one of the five [St. Louis Jesuits](#). Since the 1970s, spiritual music has reached every continent. To learn more about them, click on the link.)

Closing Prayer *New Saint Joseph People's Prayer Book* (adapted)

Risen Lord,
Your Ascension into heaven
marks the culmination of the Paschal Mystery, and it contains an important
teaching for us.
May we live life as an earthly reality and develop our human potential to the fullest.
May we make use of the results of science to achieve a better life on this planet.
In our best moments, we know that there must be more than all of this,
a transcending Reality.
As Christians, we know that this Reality is our loving Father
Who awaits us with You and the Holy Spirit.
Where You have gone, we ultimately will come . . . if we are faithful.

Source: <https://www.churchyear.net/ascensionprayers.html>

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A timely prayer quoted in a blog post from [Angie's News](#) (May 18, 2020)

A prayer by George Appleton (adapted):

“Bless, O Lord, all who are co-operating in your will for healing, all doctors, surgeons, nurses, psychiatrists, research workers, those who cook and serve and clean, all who work in preventative health, all administrators, all who study our social life to help us how to live. We thank you, O Lord of life and health, for this army of healing workers. Praise be to you and gratitude to them. Amen.”

The Sunday readings are from
[Christian Community Bible: Catholic Pastoral Edition](#)
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Questions and Commentaries © [Alfred J. Garrotto](#)
(follow the link above to the novel *Bishop Myriel: In His Own Words*)