

Commentary on the Readings for May 16, 2021 Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord

This great Feast also marks the end of an era and the beginning of another, the governance of the Church by human beings under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Because the Diocese of Sacramento (and most of the dioceses in the United States) has transferred the Feast of the Ascension to the Seventh Sunday of Easter, the Readings will be from the Feast rather than for the Seventh Sunday of Easter.

The *Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ* marks the end of Jesus' human life on earth, but not His involvement in the lives of mankind which He guides through the Church and through His Holy Spirit. Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father "from where he shall come to judge the living and the dead."

In the **First Reading**, from the *Acts of the Apostles (1:1-11)*, the writer, St. Luke, describes the last forty days of the risen Christ on earth, teaching and preparing the apostles for His departure. In addition to the event of the Ascension itself, the promise of the Holy Spirit is something we should focus on because the Holy spirit will now be given to all the baptized. It is through the Holy Spirit that God's Plan of Salvation will continue until the end of time.

The **Responsorial Psalm, (47:2-9)**, is a song that the angels and saints in heaven might have sung upon welcoming the risen and glorified Christ back into heaven after fulfilling His mission on earth. We also will be welcomed in the same way if we complete our mission — our role in God's Plan of Salvation.

In the **Second Reading**, from *St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (1:17-23)*, Paul lists the spiritual accomplishments and the honors and glory that Jesus so richly deserved by fulfilling His mission for the salvation of mankind and the Glory of the Father. We also can partake of these honors and glory if we remain in Christ and fulfill our mission on earth.

The **Gospel Reading** is from *Mark (16:15-20)*. This passage is the original ending of Mark's gospel wherein he describes Jesus' farewell instructions to His disciples of that time. It signals the transferring of Jesus' mission to the apostles and disciples and to all mankind as part of our baptismal commitment and our mission, for we are the disciples of today.

We should spend some time in meditating on the Ascension of Christ. It is not a time to be sad. I have had people ask me, "Because He was God, why couldn't He stay with us forever?" Two or three reasons come immediately to mind: (a) Jesus, God, wants to be accepted on faith, not on visual appearance, (b) as He tells the apostles in the Gospel of John (16:7ff) "*It is better for you that I go [back to the Father in heaven]. If I fail to go, the Holy Spirit will not come to you.*" Lastly, while He was here on earth, His humanity was subject to all of the limitations that the human body is subjected to, even death. Therefore, Jesus' Ascension was necessary. Something to think about during your prayer time this week!

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