

Commentary for May 21, 2023

The Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord

Because the diocese of Sacramento (and most of the dioceses in the United States) has transferred the Feast of the Ascension (which used to be celebrated on what was called Ascension Thursday, forty days after Easter) to the Seventh Sunday of the Easter Season, the Readings will be taken from the Feast rather than 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. He now guides us through the Holy Spirit and the Church. Thereafter, Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, "from where He shall come to judge the living and the dead." This great Feast also marks the end of an era and the beginning of another: the governance of the Church by human beings in conjunction with the Holy Spirit. To better understand, this, please read the Entrance Antiphon for the weekday Mass of June 2^d. It tells us how God led the Israelites — the People of God — through the desert during the time of Moses with Moses as their earthly leader. (See Psalm 68: 8 / 9)

In the **First Reading** from the ***Acts of the Apostles (1:1-11)***, 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 on Pentecost the Holy Spirit was 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.

The **Second Reading** is from ***St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (1:17-23)***. Here, Paul lists the spiritual accomplishments along with the honor and glory that Jesus so richly earned by fulfilling His, the salvation of mankind and the Glory of the Father.

The **Gospel Reading** is from ***Matthew (28:16-20)***. This passage is the very ending of Matthew's Gospel. It signals the transferring of Jesus' mission to the apostles and to all mankind as part of our baptismal commitment. It is very clear that Jesus intended that all mankind was to be included in His Church and eventually in heaven; but we cannot presume that salvation is automatic. Faith in Christ and obedience to His teachings and the Church remain the prime criteria. We encourage you to spend 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 could He not stay with us forever?" Two reasons come immediately to mind: (1) Jesus, God, wants to be accepted based on faith, not on visual appearance, and (2) as He tells the apostles in the Gospel of John (16:7f1), "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." Does the love of God reign in your heart? If not, pray to the Holy Spirit to help

you find this love, joy and peace that He promises. Something to think about during your Prayer time this week! **MFB**