

Going Back to Our Father



I. A LOOK AT THE THREE READINGS

FIRST READING (Acts 1:1-11)

Introduction: Flashback, summary

¹In the first book, Theophilus, I dealt with all that Jesus did and taught ^{2b}until the day **he was taken up**, after giving instructions through the holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

Jesus after the resurrection

^{3c}He presented himself alive to them by many proofs after he had suffered, appearing to them during forty days* and speaking about the kingdom of God. ^{4d}While meeting with them, he enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for “the promise of the Father” about which you have heard me speak; ^{5e}for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the holy Spirit.”

The community of the apostles

⁶When they had gathered together they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going* to restore the kingdom to Israel?” ^{7*}He answered them, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. ^{8*}**But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”**

The ascension of Jesus and the apostles watching

^{9h}When he had said this, as they were looking on, **he was lifted up**, and a cloud took him from their sight. ¹⁰ⁱWhile they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. ^{11j}They said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This **Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven** will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven.”

THE FOCUS: The Ascension of Jesus

COMMENTARY

- In vv.1-2, the author, Luke, recalls his first book (*the Gospel of Luke*); Theophilus is the same addressee of his gospel.
- The focus of his first book is Jesus, his words and deeds, till his ascension.
- In vv.3-5, Jesus, the risen One, makes himself present to his apostles: many proofs, appearing for 40 days, speaking of God’s kingdom; commanding them (*not to depart, but to wait for the holy Spirit, for their baptism*).
- V.6 indicates that the apostles are still operating on the old concept of Jesus’ mission (*to restore the kingdom of Israel: political*).
- In v.8, Jesus announces the apostles will be empowered by the holy Spirit and become witnesses...
- V.9 describes how Jesus ascends: he was lifted up, a cloud took him.
- In vv.10-11, angels (*dressed in white*), announcing Jesus’ glorious return in the near future.

REFLECTIONS

What is the meaning of the ascension of Jesus?

For the **author** himself, the meaning is to recall in summary form the words and deeds of Jesus in his earthly life. The author, Luke, recalls also the name of his addressee, Theophilus (mentioned first in Luke 1,1-4).

For **Jesus**, ascension means the cessation of his earthly life and going back to his Father in heaven. Before ascending, Jesus continues doing wonders, as proofs of his resurrection. Jesus does not fail to

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strengthen his apostles who are still weak at this time. In their weakness, Jesus assures them of the coming of the holy Spirit, to empower them. After they are empowered, they will become witnesses of Jesus (words, deeds, passion, death and resurrection) through the world.

For the **apostles**, meaning of the ascension should be the restoration of the kingdom of Israel (political, a kingdom like that of King David in the OT, Israelites in full control of their country).

For the **angels**, the ascension is not for ever the physical absence of Jesus but his return, re-appearance in glory.

For **us**, the ascension is _____

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9) GOD MOUNTS HIS THRONE TO SHOUTS OF JOY: A BLARE OF TRUMPETS FOR THE LORD. Or ALLELUIA.

SECOND READING (Eph 1:17-23)

Prayer of the Author for the Christians

^{17p}that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a **spirit of wisdom and revelation** resulting in knowledge of him. ^{18q}May the eyes of [your] hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are **the riches of glory** in his inheritance among the holy ones, ^{19r}and what is the surpassing **greatness of his power** for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might,

Reflection on God working in Christ (Christology)

^{20s}which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens, ^{21t}far above every principality, authority, power, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come. ^{22u}And he put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ^{23v}which is his body,* the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.

THE FOCUS: **The Gift of the Spirit**

COMMENTARY

• Since it is Ascension Sunday, we focus on the lines which have references to his ascension.

- The lines are vv. 20 and 22. They describe Jesus who is now out there in the heavens.
- Again, the reading like the first one mentions something about the spirit. It is the spirit of wisdom and revelation (=holy Spirit) in contrast to the pagan spirit that enveloped the Ephesians (pre-Christian views, Gnostic elements).
- The author prays that God may give the Christian believers the same Spirit that will give them many benefits: hope, riches, greatness.
- Jesus is the highest authority, in charge of all things, and leader of the Church.

REFLECTIONS

The tone of the letter is majestic. It reflects the destiny of those who realize the mystery of Christ.

Acceptance or correct knowledge (*heart enlightened*) of Christ leads to high heavens.

The author is not exaggerating, but affirms the unfathomable generosity of God. Again, reflect on “hope,” “riches,” and “greatness” (vv. 18-19).

God lavishes his people as Christ his Son governs over them. Christ who ascended into heaven is still in-charge of us here on earth.

GOSPEL READING (Lk 24:46-53)

Fulfillment of scriptures

^{46e}And he said to them, “Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day ^{47z}and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Mission of the apostles

^{48a}You are witnesses of these things.

Promise of the Holy Spirit

^{49b}And [behold] I am sending the promise of my Father* upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

The ascension of Jesus and response of the apostles

^{50*}Then he led them [out] as far as Bethany, raised his hands, and blessed them. ⁵¹As he blessed them he parted from them **and was taken up to heaven.** ^{52d}They did him homage and then returned



to Jerusalem with great joy,⁵³ and they were continually in the temple praising God.*

THE FOCUS: The Ascension of Jesus

COMMENTARY

- In v.46, Jesus tells his disciples that all that had happened to him (*paschal mystery: passion, death and resurrection*) is in accordance with the Holy Scriptures.
- V.47 takes again the theme of the preaching of John the Baptist at the start of the gospel: repentance, forgiveness.
- In v.48, Jesus declares that his disciples are witnesses to the mystery of Jesus. The disciples must disseminate, proclaim, announce, communicate the person of Jesus in his totality.
- Vv.50-51 describe the ascension of Jesus, blessing his disciples.
- Vv.52-53 describe the response of the disciples: homage, joy, continually praising God in the Temple.

REFLECTIONS

The scene of the ascension brings out many elements of our faith— The fulfillment of the scriptures (OT and NT). The preaching of repentance and forgiveness. The mission of the apostles to communicate as witnesses. The disposition of the apostles: joy, always praying.

What is the meaning of the ascension of Jesus here in the text?

First of all, it means the return of Jesus to where he belongs (to his Father). His mission is accomplished and he has to go back home. He cannot be with his disciples forever.

Second, it means the beginning of our mission and evangelization. What happened to Jesus (Christ-event) must be communicated to all peoples. It must not be kept secret.

Third, it means the continuation of the preaching of repentance and forgiveness.

Lastly, it is the connection with Jesus through joyful and prayerful disposition.

II. TYING THE THREE READINGS TOGETHER TO DEVELOP YOUR HOMILY/SHARING

The Gospel Reading is about the ascension of Jesus. The First Reading is about the ascension of Jesus. God through Jesus who is glorified sends His Spirit and this makes us believe in his greatness (*Second Reading*)

How to develop our homilies/sharings

Begin by telling what a loved one says when one departs (goes abroad or dies): Many reminders (to follow up, to take care), words of wisdom, adjustments to make.

The ascension or departure of Jesus brings about re-configuration (changes) in the life of the apostles. Now they are not just disciples, learners, and followers. Now they have to take personal responsibility. Each of them has to show leadership.

The main responsibility of the apostles or disciples is the proclamation of the life of Jesus, to bear witness.

The purpose of their mission is to bring people to Christ.

Precisely, the holy Spirit comes down to them after his ascension to strengthen and give them courage to face both the Jews and Gentiles who know nothing about Christ or who refuse to believe in him and who would threaten them.

The promise of the holy Spirit is found in all three readings.

The ascension of Jesus means work for us, hard work, no fooling around. We let the holy Spirit work in us. (First and Gospel Reading)

The holy Spirit makes us acknowledge the surpassing greatness of God in Jesus Christ (Second Reading).

In the eucharist, Jesus comes again. He is no longer with us physically, because he has ascended into heaven, but is present among us in the forms of bread and wine. This sacrament, together with the power of the holy Spirit, propels us to bear witness to him to all the nations and to the world.

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III. OUR CONTEXT

1. Why is Ascension less understood these days?
2. Today is Catholic Communication’s Sunday. What is the role of the Catholic Communicators in this post-elections scenario?

