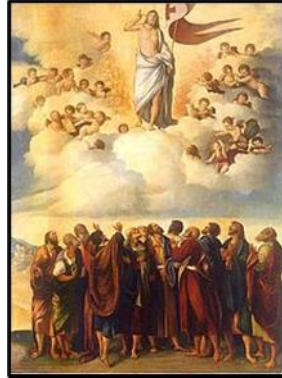


**ctkAlive! Scripture Study**  
**Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord**  
**2023—A Cycle**



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

**What do I see?**

In classical artworks, scenes like this image of the [Ascension](#), by 16th c. artist [Dosso Dossi](#), (a pseudonym used by Giovanni di Niccolò de Luteri) tend to have both an upper (heavenly) dimension and a lower (earthly) dimension.

*How aware am I of an interplay between these two realities (heavenly/earthly) in my own life?*

**Opening Prayer**

*(edited, abridged, and adapted for use here)*

O God of earth and sky,  
Jesus came among us...  
to raise us up to heaven.  
I now recall his departure  
from us to be in *all* places.

Now hidden from my sight...  
he enables me to abide in him  
by the power and grace  
of the Holy Spirit.  
He fills the whole of creation  
with his mercy and grace.  
Amen.

Original source: [St. Luke's Episcopal Church](#) (prayer no longer online)

**Scripture Readings**

Acts 1: 1-11 “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 going.

Psalms 47: 2-3, 6-9 “God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord.”

Ephesians 1: 17-23 “May you know how great is the inheritance, the glory, God sets apart for his saints.”

Matthew 28: 16-20 “I am with you always, even to the end of the earth.”

### **Introduction to the Ascension of Our Lord**

As we age in life, we experience moments of enlightenment after which we say, “I wish I had known this (*x number*) of years ago!” This awareness sheds light on the apostles’ time with their risen Lord between his Easter rising and his final Ascension. During those weeks, Jesus didn’t teach them anything he hadn’t already told and taught them. He only reminded them of what they *already knew* but had somehow lost sight of in the darkness of Good Friday. Let’s look at some key statements about that learning/remembering dynamic in the Ascension Day readings we will soon reflect on.

In Matthew 28, we read that the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain Jesus had designated. When they saw him, they worshipped him... but even still, some had doubts. One way to look at “learning” is to see it as, in fact, “remembering” what we once knew but somehow had lost, forgotten, or never fully grasped.

As St. Paul told his friends and converts in Ephesus (1: 17-23), “May Christ enlighten your *inner* vision, that you may appreciate the things we *hope for*.” In other words, they should remember well all that he himself had previously taught them—but now seemed to have forgotten. Paul called upon them to use their “inner vision” to cut through the fog of petty grievances and the challenges of changing circumstances.

In Acts 1:11, we read that—after Jesus ascended—two angels appeared to the disciples, as if to remind them... again... to build their lives and the new church on what they already knew.

This weekend’s readings offer an enlightening example of Jesus’ not teaching us something new but reminding us of what we already knew.

### **A Reading from the Acts of the Apostles (1: 1-11)**

“I wrote the former account, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after he had given orders by the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. To the same apostles also, after his suffering, he presented himself alive with many convincing proofs. He was seen by them over a forty-day period and spoke about matters concerning the kingdom of God. While he was with them, he declared, ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait there for what my Father promised, which you heard about from me. For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’

“So when they had gathered together, they began to ask him, ‘Lord, is this the time when you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?’

“He told them, ‘You are not permitted to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth.’

“After he had said this, while they were watching, he was lifted up and a cloud hid him from their sight. As they were still staring into the sky while he was going, suddenly two men in white clothing stood near them and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come back in the same way you saw him go into heaven.’”

### Personal Reflection

“... ‘you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’” It’s that same “Spirit-baptism” that 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. Jesus “ordains” us to be *missionary* disciples—whatever our life circumstances.

So, where did Jesus’ disciples go from there? Courageously out to the streets? No, they returned to their safe shelter-in-place—and waited! [Sr. Mary McGlone, CSI](#) wrote in her [National Catholic Reporter](#) reflection, “Before ascending to the Father, Jesus sent the disciples into a retreat, a 10-day time of reconstituting themselves in preparation for the experience of Pentecost.”

“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... in a poem... or an essay.*

### **Responsorial Psalm 47 (2-3, 6-9)**

*To Yahweh, king of the world.*

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

The sovereign Lord is awe-inspiring;  
he is the great king who rules the whole earth!  
He subdued nations beneath us  
and countries under our feet.  
*Yahweh mounts his throne to shouts of joy,  
a blaze of trumpets for the Lord.*

Sing to God! Sing!  
Sing to our king! Sing!  
For God is king of the whole earth!  
Sing a well-written song!

God reigns over the nations!  
God sits on his holy throne!  
*Yahweh mounts his throne to shouts of joy,  
a blaze of trumpets for the Lord.*

The nobles of the nations assemble,  
along with the people of the God of Abraham,  
for God has authority over the rulers of the earth.  
He is highly exalted!  
*Yahweh mounts his throne to shouts of joy,  
a blaze of trumpets for the Lord.*

### Personal Reflection

“Your kingdom come,” we pray in the Lord’s Prayer... but God’s kingdom has already come. The psalmist addresses our *personal acceptance* of the kingdom, our free and full acknowledgment of God’s sovereignty. However, we always find comfort in throwing responsibility back to God as the Hebrews of old once did. Hence the tone of great joy in this psalm—a seeming reference the joyful procession with the Ark of the Covenant as the people brought it up the mount to dwell in the Holy of Holies within the new Temple King Solomon built in the 10<sup>th</sup> c. BC/BCE.

Psalm 47 is surely appropriate for the feast of the Ascension. As Christians, we have additional reasons to rejoice because of the Ascension of our Lord and his promise to take us to abide with him in Afterlife.

Some of us recall the joyful Pentecostal-style Masses and prayer meetings from the 1960s and 1970s. The movement to openly joyful services of praise and adoration gradually waned and has now all-but disappeared from Catholic worship. Those who recall taking part in Spirit-moved prayer gatherings and liturgies know that this Scripture-based form of prayer can have a powerful effect on one’s prayer life.

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

— *How do I explain my own preference for mostly silent/reserved liturgical celebrations?*

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

### **A Reading from St. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians (1: 17-23)**

“I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you spiritual wisdom and revelation in your growing knowledge of him—since the *eyes of your heart* have been enlightened—so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the incomparable greatness of his power toward us who believe, as displayed in the exercise of his immense strength.

“This power God exercised in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms far above every rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

“And God put *all things* under Christ’s feet, and he gave him to the church as head over all things. Now the church is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

### Personal Reflection

Four of St. Paul’s letters are grouped as “Captivity Letters”: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Paul wrote these letters while in prison but not in the same year. Nor did he write them while in the same prison. Paul spent a lot of time in jail (2 Cor 11: 24; Acts 14: 29 and 16: 23). He certainly spent time behind bars two times, plus another under house arrest in Rome before he died in the mid-60s AD/BCE.

“God has put all things under the feet of Christ” (v. 22). This means the same as the words of our creed: “Jesus is seated at the right hand of God.” Paul adds: “(God) gave him to the church as head over all things.” Christ acts differently in two areas: (1) in the world, where he is the invisible center in charge; (2) in the Church, of which he is the head, where he can show the riches of his Spirit.

In the same NCR commentary quoted above, Sr. Mary McGlone writes: “Ephesians tells us that faith in Jesus is not belief *about* him, but a belief *in and through the community* that is his body.”

— What might St. Paul mean by “the eyes of your heart have been enlightened”?

— *If I let Jesus 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—or not yet willing to give?*

— *Dare I even pray for “total” generosity in committing myself to Christ? What holds me back from total self-surrender? What am I afraid of?*

## The Gospel According to St. Matthew (28: 16-20)

“So the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain Jesus had designated. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Then Jesus came up and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

### Personal Reflection

Jesus sent his apostles to evangelize the world. Matthew sums up Jesus’ final apparition in the simplest of words—no sudden and dramatic appearance, no fear, no physical demonstration of his reality. We need to focus on Jesus’ final instructions before his permanent departure. Some who witnessed Jesus’ final appearance still harbored lingering doubts.

“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 arrive having kept my faith safely intact but... all to myself?*

Even if I was baptized as an infant, there are moments in life when I have to make an adult decision to ratify—or reject—my childhood faith. Jesus invites me to trade my childhood faith for a mature, adult faith.

— *“When did that moment of adult “conversion” occur in my life? Can I date it and/or cite the occasion or event? How did it change me? Have I remained true and faithful to that gifted, personal moment of total commitment?*

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

## For inspirational Listening Watching, and Reading

### Watch

[\*“Why the Ascension Matters”\*](#) by [Bishop Robert Barron](#), Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles. A truly enlightening video about Jesus’ ascension (8 min.)

### Listen

[“Earthen Vessels”](#) composed and sung by [Fr. John Foley](#)

### Read

A random—not vetted—list of books about the [Ascension](#) of Jesus

## Journaling Prompts

Based on this weekend’s Scripture readings, what does Jesus ask me to do TODAY regarding...

- (1) the quality of the love I bring to my personal relationships... and
- (2) my life as an emissary of Christ, committed to bringing God's love to the people with whom I interact in person and on social media?

*Who needs to receive from me this week a moment of laughter and personal concern?  
Why do I hesitate?*

In light of this weekend's Scriptures, take some time to write about events occurring in your life this week and what you see happening in the world.

### **Preview of Next Week's Scriptures**

Pentecost Sunday

Acts 2: 1-11 "There appeared to them tongues of fire...."

Psalm 104: 1, 24, 29-31, 34 "O Lord my God, you are great indeed!"

1 Corinthians 12: 3-7, 12-13 "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."

John 20: 19-23 "Jesus stood in their midst and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'"

### **Closing Prayer**

*(edited, abridged, and adapted for use here)*

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.

Source: A prayer by [George Appleton](#) (adapted) found on [Angie's News](#) (May 18, 2020)



**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.*

***Gender usage in these reflections:*** *We are conscious of gender references to God in the Scripture texts. Often, attempts to rewrite these passages result in awkward sentence structures. We have left the biblical translations as they are but do our best to be inclusive in all other parts of the reflection.*

***Note:*** *Some internet links endure online, others come and go. If a link fails, the owner of the site may have taken it down.*

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