

ctkAlive! Scripture Study
Feast of the Ascension
2021—B Cycle



Jesus' Ascension
by [John Singleton Copley](#) (1775)

Gender usage in writing: 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.

Opening Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

Ascension Day Prayer

Jesus Christ, our mediator and high priest,
I thank you for becoming human and for experiencing
the joys and sorrows of life, which assures me that
you rejoice and sympathize with me.
I praise you for the many joys of my life:
for the beauty of creation,
your work in this world,
the growth of your kingdom,
the gift of eternal life.
As mediator, you petition your Father on my behalf,
so I bring my prayers before you:
for creation and its care,
for my nation . . . all nations,
for my communities and those in authority,
for the church universal,
for my local church and its ministries,
for all with particular needs.
I pray this in your name, O Christ,
my mediator and high priest. Amen.

Source: [Reformed Worship](#)—Ascension Day Service

Feast of the Ascension Readings

Acts 1: 1-11 “As they were looking on, (the Risen Christ) was lifted, and a cloud took him from their sight.”

Psalms 47: 2-3, 6-9 “God mounts his throne amid shouts of joy.”

Ephesians 1: 17-23 “May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened.”

Mark 16: 15-20 “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.”

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

“In the first part of my work, Theophilus, I [Luke] 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?’

“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

In the early chapters of Luke’s Book of Acts, the original apostles affirm their election as “witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus.” During his several post-resurrection appearances, they touched him; he asked for something to eat; he cooked breakfast for them on a lakeside beach. They based their testimony on personal experience of all that Jesus did and said to his apostles before and after his resurrection.

The apostles themselves had a hard time accepting the death of Jesus. Then, they got him back! And now he’s leaving them again.

— *What part(s) of the post-resurrection and ascension stories do I find the most puzzling, even troubling? Why? How do I resolve or live with my questions?*

After the Ascension, the apostles realized he had not left them a detailed roadmap for organizing a massive, worldwide mission—other than a non-specific promise to “be with” them as they moved forward.

— *When have I wished I had a clearer roadmap to follow in living my life from day to day? What parts or roles in my life do I find most challenging? Where do I turn when I need help in understanding my real-life challenges (career/vocation, partners, friends, education, domicile, etc.)?*

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

To God, king of the world

*God mounts his throne to shouts of joy:
a blare 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 [revered];
he is a great king all over the earth.
*God mounts his throne to shouts of joy:
a blare 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 mounts his throne to shouts of joy:
a blare of trumpets for the Lord.*

God is King of all the earth;
sing to him a hymn of praise.
For God now rules over the nations,
God reigns from his holy Throne.
*God mounts his throne to shouts of joy:
a blare of trumpets for the Lord.*

Personal Reflection

Today’s Christians may find it hard to connect with the spirit of Psalm 47. The whole mood and tone resembles a Pentecostal-style revival meeting. Most American Catholics prefer the orderly and subdued Masses they grew up with. In this psalm, we sense a strong element of Jewish pride, expressed in music and dance, as the people praise Yahweh for all good gifts. They responded by joyfully receiving his commandments.

This psalm fits nicely into the spirit of our Ascension liturgy. It gives us hope that, no matter how uncertain and complex our lives become, our God will guide us through life’s storms to our final destination.

— *Where do I experience God's presence in my life, other than at Mass in my parish church?*

"Acclaim God with shouts of joy." This week we again hear that elusive quality, *joy*.

— *In my daily life, how do I distinguish between "contentment," "happiness" and "joy"? How do these life experiences differ (though we might mistake them as meaning the same thing)?*

A Reading from St. Paul's 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

Paul lived at a time when any project to transform the whole of humanity had little chance of success. All the more reason to delight in the faith of the Ephesians. Above all, he prays they may have *hope* and see it as the source of dynamism in living their faith. Converted believers *lived* the experience of resurrection through baptism. They saw the value of each person regardless of social status.

Today's Christians have the mission of carrying hope in their hearts and sharing it with the rest of the world.

— *What does the virtue of hope mean to me? How well do I live my life in a spirit of undying hope? How do I experience that daily challenge?*

— *What obstacles make it difficult for me to remain hopeful about my life, my family, my future, and the future of our country and the world? How does my faith help me to maintain hope, seemingly against all odds?*

"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."

— *How do I define 'wisdom'? How does it differ from 'knowledge'? Would I describe myself as a wise person? On what basis do I assess my level of wisdom?*

Proclamation from the Gospel according to Mark (16: 15-20)

"Then Jesus told them, 'Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; the one who refuses

to believe will be condemned. Signs like these will accompany those who have believed: in my name they will cast out demons and speak new languages; they will pick up snakes, and if they drink anything poisonous, they will be unharmed; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will be healed.'

"After speaking to them, the Lord Jesus was taken up into heaven and took his place at the right hand of God. The Eleven* went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it."

Personal Reflection

"Proclaim the Good News to *all* creation." The Good News of Christ is a seed planted in the world to flourish in every field of human life and endeavor. Salvation is not a gift to isolated, individual souls. The Ascension mandate challenged the apostles to proclaim to all creation (including humans, animals, and the environment) all they had seen and learned from Jesus. They—and we—must be the yeast that transforms human history, from one generation to the next.

The most *controversial* elements in Jesus' farewell address are verses 17-18: "They will pick up snakes, and if they drink anything poisonous, they will be unharmed."

- Some commentaries suggest that this statement seems like a later addition to Mark's original text.

- Writing in the Arlington (VA) [Catholic Herald](#), Fr. [Paul D. Scalia](#) offers this: "Rather than getting hung up on whether to become snake-handlers, we should consider what these extraordinary signs teach about the Church." Read the entire article at "[Accompanying Signs](#)."

Jesus said, 'Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation.' Then, we learn that "the Eleven went forth and preached everywhere." The core disciples first interpreted 'everywhere' to mean to people of the Jewish faith, wherever they lived. We wonder if the 'everywhere' and 'all nations' mandates struck the Apostles as so daunting that it paralyzed them?

— *How feasible is it that the first leaders of the Jerusalem felt so daunted that God finally had to nudge Peter in a visionary moment before he baptized the first Gentile, Cornelius, a Roman centurion (Acts 10: 25-48)? Can I think of any other explanation?*

— *When has God had to "bop me on the head" to get my attention and do the right thing? What were the circumstances of that "bopping"? How did it all turn out?*

Challenge question: *Who replaced Judas as the 12th Apostle?* If you need help, go to <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-x>

The Week Ahead

Journaling Prompts

— *Based on this weekend's Scripture readings, what does the Risen Christ ask me to do regarding . . .*
(1) the quality of the love I bring to my personal relationships . . . and
(2) my life as an emissary of the Risen Christ, committed to bringing his kind of love to the people with whom I interact in person and on social media?

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

Take some time to write about your experience and feelings about events occurring in your life today and what you see happening in the world.

For Inspirational Listening/Reading

Music:

Here's a special gift to lay at Mary's feet during this month of May. A new version of "[Ave, Maria.](#)" [Carly Paoli](#) performs her stunning version accompanied by marvelous scenes of Roman art and architecture as background. The Vatican adopted this interpretation of the "Ave Maria" for the Holy year of Mercy 2016 celebrations.

Composer: [Romano Musumarra](#); lyrics by [Grant Black](#).

After the "Ave, Maria," stay tuned and treat yourself to the rest of the 45 min. concert. The visuals are as inspiring as the music.

Video:

[Bishop Robert Barron](#) on "[Why the Ascension Matters](#)" (8 min.)

Barron suggests pagan Greek philosopher Plato's teaching on "afterlife" influenced later Catholic understanding of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension more than Jesus' own Jewish image of "What happens next?" He lays out the differences and suggests we . . . (see for yourself what his answer is.)

Preview of Next Week's Scriptures

Feast of Pentecost

Acts 2: 1-11 "Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire."

Psalms 104: 1, 24, 29-31, 34 "Lord, send out your spirit and renew the face of the earth."

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

John 20: 19-23 "Receive the Holy Spirit. . . ."

Closing Prayer

(edited for use here)

A prayer for better communication

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Help me to recognize the evil latent

in communication that does not build communion.
Help me to remove all venom from my judgments.
Help me to speak about all others as my brothers and sisters.

You are faithful and trustworthy;
may my words be seeds of goodness for the world:
where there is shouting, let me practice listening;
where there is confusion, let me inspire harmony;
where there is ambiguity, let me bring clarity;
where there is exclusion, let me offer solidarity;
where there is superficiality, let me raise real questions;
where there is prejudice, let me awaken trust;
where there is hostility, let me bring respect;
where there is falsehood, let me bring truth.
Amen.

—Pope Francis, *World Communications Day 2018* (quoted by [Ann Garrido](#) in [Rules of Engagement](#))

Questions?

Send any questions or comments you might have to algarrotto@comcast.net

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