

Sunday, May 24, 2020

The Ascension of the Lord

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Acts 1:1-11

2nd Reading: Ephesians 1:17-23

Responsorial: Psalm 47:2-3, 6-9

Gospel: Matthew 28:16-20

Being Used by Jesus to Help Build the Kingdom of God

Are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? (Acts 1:6)

Amazing. After three years of traveling with Jesus, after seeing him arrested, tried, and crucified, after seeing him risen from the dead, even after forty days of Holy Spirit-inspired instruction—after all this, the apostles are still confused. They ask Jesus if he is now going to kick out the Romans and restore Israel to its former glory. They just didn't get it yet.

Still, we can ask a similar question today: “Lord, when are you going to come and set everything right again? What about all the wars and poverty and abortions?”

In response, Jesus tells the apostles, and us: *Yes, I came to establish the kingdom of God—but I want you to help build it.*

It's only right, on today of all days, to praise Jesus with “a blare of trumpets” (Responsorial Psalm). But in the midst of our celebrating, Jesus' words still reverberate: “You will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8). “Go, . . . and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

Jesus may have ascended, but the work of his kingdom continues—and he has placed that work in our hands. That's why he promised us the Holy Spirit. We need the Spirit so that our attempts to preach the gospel, take a stand against sin, and lift up the poor are filled with God's own grace and love.

It's not as hard as you might think. Preaching the gospel can be as simple as offering to pray for a struggling friend or sharing with a neighbor about how God helped you during a tough situation. Lifting up the poor can mean a weekly visit to a nursing home or increasing your donations to the poor box. Taking a stand against sin can mean praying for people's conversion or trying to establish a more peaceful environment in the home.

Yes, Jesus is going to restore his kingdom. And he's going to use you to do it.

“Come, Holy Spirit, and fill our hearts. Empower us to build a kingdom worthy of the risen Lord!”

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. The first reading describes Jesus' resurrection appearances and includes him telling them to wait for *the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak; for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit*. He also tells them these words: *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*. After Jesus ascends, these words are spoken to the apostles: *Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven*.
 - Why do you think Jesus emphasized to his apostles the importance of waiting to be *baptized with the Holy Spirit*, receiving *the promise of the Father*, and receiving *power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you*?
 - How important to you are the above words, as well as the promise that Jesus will *return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven*, that is, his second coming? Why?
2. The responsorial psalm provides a foreshadowing of the joy and celebration that may have occurred in heaven upon Jesus' return: *God mounts his throne amid shouts of joy; the LORD, amid trumpet blasts. Sing praise to God, sing praise; sing praise to our king, sing praise. For king of all the earth is God; sing hymns of praise*.
 - Why do you think the reaction in Heaven on Jesus' return would be described using such words as *shouts of joy*, *trumpet blasts*, and *Sing praise to God, sing praise; sing praise to our king, sing praise*?
 - Spend a minute or so in quiet reflection and try to imagine your first day(s) in Heaven. What do you think they will be like?
3. The second reading begins with a prayer by St. Paul: *May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. 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, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might, which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens..*
 - Why do you think receiving a *Spirit of wisdom and revelation* results in *knowledge of him*?
 - Why would the enlightenment of our hearts result in knowing *what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe*?
 - What does St. Paul's prayer mean to you? Would you consider praying parts of this prayer for family members and others? What do you think the fruits of doing this would be?
4. The Gospel reading opens with these words: *The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age*.
 - Why do you think the apostles' initial reactions to Jesus' final appearance was *they doubted*?
 - What do you think their reaction was to the last words Jesus speaks to them?
 - What is your reaction to the final words of Jesus to his apostles? Do they fill you with joy? Why or why not?
 - What steps can you take to be more open to Jesus' presence *with you always* during the day?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the first reading and this verse: *Are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel* (Acts 1:6). It includes these words: "Jesus may have ascended, but the work of his kingdom continues—and he has placed that work in our hands. That's why he promised us the Holy Spirit. We need the Spirit so that our attempts to preach the gospel, take a stand against sin, and lift up the poor are filled with God's own grace and love." The meditation ends as follows: "Yes, Jesus is going to restore his kingdom. And he's going to use you to do it."
 - Do you believe that: "Jesus may have ascended, but the work of his kingdom continues—and he has placed that work in our hands" and that "he's going to use you to do it"? Why or why not?
 - Do you also believe that "We need the Spirit so that our attempts to preach the gospel, take a stand against sin, and lift up the poor are filled with God's own grace and love"? Why is the Holy Spirit so important?

Take some time now to pray and ask for a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit and for the power to help in building the Lord's kingdom. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

"Come, Holy Spirit, and fill our hearts. Empower us to build a kingdom worthy of the risen Lord!"

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization (www.christlife.org), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (www.nsc-chariscenter.org), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National Fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]