

ASCENSION OF THE LORD– 1 JUNE 2025



COLLECT

Gladden us with holy joys, almighty God,
and make us rejoice with devout thanksgiving,
for the Ascension of Christ your Son
is our exaltation,
and, where the Head has gone before in glory,
the Body is called to follow in hope.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

READINGS AND REFLECTIONS

Embedded in the name of this feast is the idea of ‘going up’. We naturally speak of ‘up to heaven’ and ‘down to earth’. Indeed, the accounts of the Ascension from the end of Luke’s gospel and the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles describe this lifting up – Acts is the most explicit: *‘lifted up, a cloud took him from their sight, they stood there staring into the sky’*. Our minds and imaginations probably need this spatial geography, but we do need to realise that heaven is not a physical place ‘up there’ beyond the clouds above the blue sky. It cannot be discovered through space exploration. It is a reality of a different order.

Perhaps the gospel expresses it better when it says, *as he blessed them, he withdrew from them... they worshipped him...* The risen Christ cannot be trapped in space and time but continues to dwell in our midst. The Ascension celebrates the glorious presence of Christ which fills the whole of creation. Next Sunday this presence of the risen Lord will be explained in terms of the action and power of the Holy Spirit. Christ’s resurrection, ascension and the coming of the Spirit are dimensions of the one Easter mystery.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles 1:1–11

In my earlier work, Theophilus, I dealt with everything Jesus had done and taught from the beginning until the day he gave his instructions to the apostles he had chosen through the Holy Spirit, and was taken up to heaven. He had shown himself alive to them after his Passion by many demonstrations: for forty days he had continued to appear to them and tell them about the kingdom of God. When he had been at table with them, he had told them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for what the Father had promised. 'It is' he had said 'what you have heard me speak about: John baptised with water but you, not many days from now, will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.'

Now having met together, they asked him, 'Lord, has the time come? Are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know times or dates that the Father has decided by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth.'

As he said this he was lifted up while they looked on, and a cloud took him from their sight. They were still staring into the sky when suddenly two men in white were standing near them and they said, 'Why are you men from Galilee standing here looking into the sky? Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, this same Jesus will come back in the same way as you have seen him go there.'

First Reading

We have been reading from the Acts of the Apostles since Easter Sunday. Now we go back to the start of the book which sets out Luke's chronology. Christ appeared to the disciples for forty days; now at the ascension, he promises the gift of the Holy Spirit who will come with power and the disciples will go out to witness to the risen Christ; then he is taken from their sight.

Surprisingly, the apostles still expect some kind of political restoration in association with the coming of the kingdom. This is the context for the promise of the Holy Spirit which places the events in a different realm. The mission Christ gives – to be witnesses – expands from Jerusalem to 'the ends of the earth'. Indeed, it is just this story which will be told in the rest of the book.

The first sentence is very long and requires careful preparation. The variety of material – reporting, instruction, dialogue and action – make this an interesting text for readers to proclaim and for the assembly to receive. But all should be aware of the strangeness of the content – the forthcoming sending of the Spirit, the 'hiding' or withdrawal of the risen Christ who is ending his appearances, and the still unknown challenge of the apostles' mission.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 46:2–3, 6–9

R. God mounts his throne to shouts of joy:
a blare of trumpets for the Lord.
or

R. Alleluia.

All peoples, clap your hands,
cry to God with shouts of joy!
For the Lord, the Most High, we must fear,
great king over all the earth. **R.**

God goes up with shouts of joy;
the Lord goes up with trumpet blast.
Sing praise for God, sing praise,
sing praise to our king, sing praise. **R.**

God is king of all the earth.
Sing praise with all your skill.
God is king over the nations;
God reigns on his holy throne. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 46/47 expresses joy and praise. The clapping, shouting, trumpet-sounding and singing suggest a festive procession or some other exuberant liturgical rite.

The image of 'mounting' the throne or 'going up' may be intended to evoke the risen Christ 'going up'.

With repeated references to 'sing praise' and the blast of the trumpet, it would seem very odd for this psalm to be proclaimed by a reader; it cries out for a cantor and singing. It will be easier to sing the response because the music will unite both parts of the response and make it memorable.

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews **9:24–28; 10:19–23**

It is not as though Christ has entered a man-made sanctuary which was only modelled on the real one; but it was heaven itself, so that he could appear in the actual presence of God on our behalf. And he does not have to offer himself again and again, like the high priest going into the sanctuary year after year with the blood that is not his own, or else he would have had to suffer over and over again since the world began. Instead of that, he has made his appearance once and for all, now at the end of the last age, to do away with sin by sacrificing himself. Since men only die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, too, offers himself only once to take the faults of many on himself, and when he appears a second time, it will not be to deal with sin but to reward with salvation those who are waiting for him.

In other words, brothers, through the blood of Jesus we have the right to enter the sanctuary, by a new way which he had opened for us, a living opening through the curtain, that is to say, his body. And we have the supreme high priest over all the house of God. So as we go in, let us be sincere in heart and filled with faith, our mind sprinkled and free from any trace of bad conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us keep firm in the hope we profess, because the one who made the promise is faithful.

A reading from the holy Gospel **according to Luke 24:46–53**

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this.

'And now I am sending down to you what the Father has promised. Stay in the city then, until you are clothed with the power from on high.' Then he took them out as far as the outskirts of Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. Now as he blessed them, he withdrew from them and was carried up heaven. They worshipped him and then went back to Jerusalem full of joy; and they were continually in the Temple praising God.

Second Reading

One can read the beautiful blessing from Ephesians 1:17-23 each year on this feast, but optional second readings are given for Years B and C.

This year the optional text is from the letter to the Hebrews. It will be difficult for both the reader and the assembly. The two sections here juxtaposed speak of Christ entering the sanctuary, that is, the sanctuary of heaven. But the metaphor is the high priest who enters the Temple in Jerusalem to offer sacrifice.

The author is arguing the superiority of Christ's priestly self-sacrifice over Jewish sacrificial and atonement rites which have been superseded by the unique and eternally efficacious sacrifice of Christ. When he offered himself on the cross, Christ did away with sin once and for all and laid open the heavenly sanctuary.

The close argumentation and high literary style add to the difficulty of the content. The reader must prepare well. Study the text to ensure a clear grasp of the key points and the line of argument, and then practise the lengthy and heavily laden sentences to enable a confident, clear presentation.

Gospel

These words from the end of Luke's gospel occur on the day of the resurrection, following the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus and the appearance of the risen Lord to the apostles.

The risen Christ spells out for them that the gospel would be preached to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. The apostles will soon take up this mission when they are 'clothed with power from on high'. Christ says he is sending upon them the gift promised by the Father (the Holy Spirit). He takes them outside the city and 'withdraws' from them. By then, it must have been quite late at night.

The apostles are not sad – they go back to the city full of joy! The ascension is not an ending, but a new beginning, the establishment of a new relationship with the risen Lord in the Holy Spirit.

BLESSING FOR ASCENSION

May almighty God bless us,
for on this very day his Only Begotten Son
pierced the heights of heaven
and unlocked for us the way
to ascend to where he is.

Amen.

May he grant that,
as Christ after his Resurrection
was seen plainly by his disciples,
so when he comes as Judge
he may show himself merciful to us for all eternity.

Amen.

And may we, who believe he is seated
with the Father in his majesty,
know with joy the fulfilment of his promise
to stay with you until the end of time.

Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
come down on us and remain with us for ever.

Amen.

(Adapted from the Solemn Blessing for The Ascension of the Lord, Roman Missal p 713.)

An alternative translation of the scripture readings is given here from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This may be particularly useful for those in parishes which use the NRSV Lectionary.

THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles 1:1–11

In the first book, Theophilus,
I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught
from the beginning
until the day when he was taken up to heaven,
after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit
to the Apostles whom he had chosen.
After his suffering he presented himself alive to them
by many convincing proofs,
appearing to them during forty days
and speaking about the kingdom of God.

While staying with them,
he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem,
but to wait there for the promise of the Father.
“This,” he said, “is what you have heard 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 come together, they asked him,
“Lord, is this the time when you will restore
the kingdom to Israel?”
He replied, “It is not for you 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,
in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

When he had said this, as they were watching,
he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.
While he was going
and they were gazing up toward heaven
suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.

They said, “Men of Galilee,
why do you stand looking up toward heaven?
This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven,
will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (NRSV)

Psalm 47.1-2, 5-6, 7-8 (R.5a)

R. God mounts the throne to shouts of joy:
a blare of trumpets for the Lord.

or:

R. Alleluia! (*Two or three times*)

Clap your hands, all you peoples;
shout to God with loud songs of joy.
For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome,
a great king over all the earth. **R.**

God has gone up with a shout,
the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.
Sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our King, sing praises. **R.**

For God is the king of all the earth;
sing praises with a psalm.
God is king over the nations;
God sits on his holy throne. **R.**

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews 9:24–28; 10:19–23

Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands,
a mere copy of the true one,
but he entered into heaven itself,
to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.
Nor was it to offer himself again and again,
as the high priest enters the Holy Place
year after year with blood that is not his own;
for then he would have had to suffer again and again
since the foundation of the world.
But as it is, he has appeared once for all
at the end of the age
to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Just as it is appointed for mortals to die once,
and after that comes the judgment,
so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many,
will appear a second time, not to deal with sin,
but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Therefore, my friends,
since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary
by the blood of Jesus,
by the new and living way that he opened for us
through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,
and since we have a great priest over the house of God,
let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith,
with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience
and our bodies washed with pure water.
Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering,
for he who has promised is faithful.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke 24:46–53

Jesus said to the disciples,
“These are my words that I spoke to you
while I was still with you -
that everything written about me in the law of Moses,
the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.”

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,
and he said to them,

“Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer
and to rise from the dead on the third day,
and that repentance and forgiveness of sins
is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations,
beginning from Jerusalem.

You are witnesses to these things.

“And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised;
so stay here in the city
until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

Then he led them out as far as Bethany,
and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them.

While he was blessing them,
he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.

And they worshipped him,
and returned to Jerusalem with great joy;
and they were continually in the temple blessing God.