

The Ascension of the Lord, Year C

GOSPEL

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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 to heaven. They worshipped him and then went back to Jerusalem full of joy; and they were continually in the Temple praising God.

(Luke 24:46–53)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The Gospel of Luke opens with Zechariah praying in the temple and closes with the disciples praying in the temple. The temple plays a critical role in Luke’s account of the public life of Jesus.
- While the fact of Jesus’ ascension to the Father is mentioned several times in the New Testament (Mark 16:19; John 6:62; John 20:17, Ephesians 4:8–10), only Luke describes the event itself, both in his gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles.
- Bethany is a small town not far from Jerusalem, just over the Mount of Olives. It was the hometown of Mary, Martha and Lazarus.
- The nine days between the ascension and Pentecost that the disciples spent in praying together gave rise to the ‘novena’, a devotional practice of praying in a particularly focused way for a special intention over nine consecutive days.

EXPLORING THE WORD

The reaction of the disciples to the absence of Jesus after his ascension is in stark contrast to the reaction they had to him leaving at his death. After his death on the cross, they shut themselves into the upper room in fear. Now they worship him and go joyfully rejoicing to the temple. Clearly now they have not lost the sense of his presence with them. Something has changed. His return to God opens the way to glory for all who believe, and this is the source of their joy. He is beyond their sight but truly with them, and he has repeated again his promise to send the help they will need to undertake their mission into the world. These final verses of Luke’s Gospel introduce what will become the story of his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles: ‘repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’ Acts tells the story of the Gospel being taken out to all the nations, a story that continues to this day.

- In what ways are you just like the disciples—beginning a new journey out into the world?
- In what ways is the Gospel still being taken to the ends of the earth?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What has the Father promised to you?
- How do you feel since you ‘were clothed with power from on high’ at the Easter ceremonies?
- ‘You are witnesses to this.’ Try to define what it is that you are called to give witness to. In what ways can you attest to the truth of that?
- This gospel tells the story of the closing of one era and the opening up of another. What experiences have you had of the closing off of one chapter of your life and the opening of another? Share your stories.
- Live joyfully this week. Try to bring joy to others. Practise continually praising God in all the small actions of your day.
- Today’s entrance antiphon is suitable as a prayer for this week:

*You kingdoms of the earth, sing to God;
praise the Lord who ascends to the highest heavens;
his majesty and might are in the skies, alleluia.*

