

Ascension

(2014)

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- “... *behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.*”
- Jesus’ final command...and His pledge...to the apostles, and to us...and our assurance of the truth of the teaching of His Church.
- One thing the Church teaches us is that, though a work may be attributed to one Person of the Holy Trinity...because these three Persons are One God, the work of one is the work of all three in some mysterious way.
- And so when Jesus promises to be with the Church until His second coming...which is what “the end of the age” means...that, too, is an absolute and unbreakable promise of the Trinity...of God.
- And why would that surprise?...or why would we even doubt? All through the Old Testament...even with all of their infidelities over the 1700 years or so from Moses to Jesus...God was adamant that Israel was His people, and that He would never abandon them.
- And Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise—the world’s savior... the one mediator between God and all mankind—sprung forth from the theretofore Chosen people.
- And if God never broke His promise then...why would we dare doubt Him and think He would break it now?
- So take comfort in and trust the Church and her teaching, for she has the promise of Christ Himself to guide her...just as He told Peter, our first Pope: “*You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*” (Matt 16:18-19)
- What God promises not only will be, but MUST be done.
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- Now today, of course, we celebrate the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven after His Resurrection—one of the essential articles of our Catholic faith.
- We hear this in both the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds: "*He ascended into Heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*"
- St. Luke records the Ascension both in his Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles, as we just read.
- Remember that Luke was a companion of St. Paul as Paul went around evangelizing, and thus Luke very likely met with many of Jesus' original apostles and witnesses of the Ascension itself, and he wrote of what they told him.
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- Is Luke our only testimony? Where else do we hear of the Ascension?
- St. Paul affirms this teaching of the Church: "*He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.*" (Eph 4:10 RSV)
- Paul also writes to St. Timothy: "*He was manifested in the flesh... preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.*" (1 Tim 3:16 RSV)
- In 1 Peter: "*Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.*" (1 Peter 3:21-22 RSV)
- The letter to the Hebrews: "*Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands...but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.*" (Heb 9:24 RSV)
- And, of course, Jesus himself foretold His Ascension when He instructed Mary Magdalene to tell the apostles: "*I am ascending to my Father and your Father...*" (John 20:17 RSV)
- And in the Mass, this article of faith is affirmed once again when the priest prays one or the other variations of: "*Father, we*

celebrate the memory of Christ, your Son. We...recall his passion, his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into glory...

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- After all...returning in His body to Heaven is not “difficult” for Jesus, because He is God...and the Ascension simply marks the end of His mission upon the earth, and the beginning of the final stage of salvation which we continue in even today.
- Jesus’ Ascension confirms His Word to us, and confirms our hope in what he said: *“I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father.”* (Joh 16:28 RSV)...*I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you also may be.”* (John 14:3 RSV)
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- As to His Ascension, the Church reminds us not to limit God to physicality; He is far beyond that. He is not A being; He is Being itself. Which is greater, the painting or the painter? Just so, God is not bounded by the universe, but the universe bounded by God.
- Early depictions of the Ascension are largely metaphorical...simplistic depictions of using human language to describe something that language is totally inadequate to describe...the apostles, all kneeling, looking up into the air... above them a barrier of cloud...and above that the figure of Jesus rising towards the Father’s throne to sit beside Him.
- And we in the earthbound language of our senses say that Jesus “sits” at the right hand of the Father... but thrones, sitting, “right hands” of God, are simply symbols and metaphors of a much greater reality.

- In Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension, He tore aside the veil of separation between Heaven and earth, going forth into His Father's presence to make atonement for our sins.
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- And since...and because of...the Ascension, we know absolutely that Heaven is our desirable and attainable, goal...and being faithful to Christ is our path to it.
- Will the elect...those who are saved...ascend? Yes. Paul tells us: *"...the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord."* (1Th 4:16-17 RSV)
- Now the mechanics of how God will do this are beyond us. But don't miss the train simply because you don't know how the engine works.
- Is Heaven a place, a spiritual state, something in-between...or something altogether different? We cannot know.
- But our best window on eternity is simply to know that God loves us and wants us to be with Him, and wants us to long for Him as did St. Paul when he wrote: *"My desire is to depart [this life] and be with Christ, for that is far better."* (Phil 1:23)
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- The path that leads to God...to Heaven...is the path of the Gospel...the path of loving God with our whole heart, and of loving our neighbor as ourselves.
- ...and to go to Christ, we must follow that path—certainly a rocky and difficult path at times, but the only one that leads us home.

[Acts 1:1-11](#)

In the first book, Theophilus,
I dealt with all that Jesus did and taught
until the day he was taken up,
after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit
to the apostles whom he had chosen.
He presented himself alive to them
by many proofs after he had suffered,
appearing to them during forty days
and speaking about the kingdom of God.
While meeting with the them,
he enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem,
but 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.”

When they had gathered together they asked him,
“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”
He answered them, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons
that the Father has established 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,
and to the ends of the earth.”

When he had said this, as they were looking on,
he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight.

While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going,
suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them.

They said, “Men of Galilee,
why are you standing there looking at the sky?

This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen
him going into heaven.”

[Ps 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9](#)

Responsorial Psalm

R. (6) **God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

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All you peoples, clap your hands,
shout to God with cries of gladness,
For the LORD, the Most High, the awesome,
is the great king over all the earth.

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

or:

R. Alleluia.

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.

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

or:

R. Alleluia.

For king of all the earth is God;
sing hymns of praise.
God reigns over the nations,
God sits upon his holy throne.

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

or:

R. Alleluia.

[Eph 1:17-23](#)

Reading II

Brothers and sisters:

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,
far above every principality, authority, power, and dominion,
and every name that is named

not only in this age but also in the one to come.
And he put all things beneath his feet
and gave him as head over all things to the church,
which is his body,
the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.

Or [HEB 9:24-28; 10:19-23](#)

Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands,
a copy of the true one, but heaven itself,
that he might now appear before God on our behalf.
Not that he might offer himself repeatedly,
as the high priest enters each year into the sanctuary
with blood that is not his own;
if that were so, he would have had to suffer repeatedly
from the foundation of the world.
But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages
to take away sin by his sacrifice.
Just as it is appointed that men and women die once,
and after this the judgment, so also Christ,
offered once to take away the sins of many,
will appear a second time, not to take away sin
but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since through the blood of Jesus
we have confidence of entrance into the sanctuary
by the new and living way he opened for us through the veil,
that is, his flesh,
and since we have a great priest over the house of God, “
let us approach with a sincere heart and in absolute trust,
with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience
and our bodies washed in pure water.
Let us hold unwaveringly to our confession that gives us hope,
for he who made the promise is trustworthy.

Gospel [LK 24:46-53](#)

Jesus said to his disciples:
“Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer
and rise from the dead on the third day
and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins,
would be preached in his name

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to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.
You are witnesses of these things.
And behold I am sending the promise of my Father upon you;
but stay in the city
until you are clothed with power from on high.”

Then he led them out as far as Bethany,
raised his hands, and blessed them.
**As he blessed them he parted from them
and was taken up to heaven.**
They did him homage
and then returned to Jerusalem with great joy,
and they were continually in the temple praising God.