



CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES

Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation

May 12, 2013

The Ascension of the Lord

Gospel reading Luke 24:46-53 *[To be read aloud]*

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 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.

Brief commentary:

Three great feasts mark the Easter season: Easter, Ascension and Pentecost. Today's feast of the Ascension of the Lord fills us with joy and hope, as it did for the disciples. The readings all describe the meaning of Christ's Ascension, of his glorious exaltation at the 'right hand of the Father'. By returning to the Father from whom he had come, Jesus is 'lifted up and draws us to himself' (John 12:32). In glory Jesus Christ is powerfully present to each of us and to the whole Church: "Wherever two or more are gathered in my name, I will be there in their midst...I will be with you to the end of the age." The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes the significance of Jesus' heavenly ministry succinctly, but powerfully: "Jesus Christ, having entered the sanctuary of heaven once and for all, intercedes constantly for us as the mediator who assures us of the permanent outpouring of the Holy Spirit" (CCC #667). In parallel to Luke's ascension story in the Acts of the Apostles, we read today about Jesus' ascension from Luke's other shorter version of the story found in his gospel. In both cases Jesus gives his disciples instructions to wait in Jerusalem until they are "clothed with power from on high...the promise of my Father." This power, this promise, is none other than the Holy Spirit, who will empower them to become the "witnesses" of Jesus and his gospel starting in Jerusalem and reaching to the ends of the Earth. The Holy Spirit, gift of the Risen Lord, also empowers all Christians and the Church for mission in the world. This concise but dense gospel reading mentions the most important gifts that come to us as a result of Jesus' passion, death, resurrection and ascension: repentance for the forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit, the new community, and great joy. The ascension is not the conclusion of Jesus' mission, but rather its universal expansion in and through the Church, filled and living with his Spirit. Through the Sacraments the Holy Spirit empowers us to live our mission as Jesus' witnesses and apostles of his saving Gospel with authenticity and boldness.

Today's reading offers significant messages:

- Before his exaltation at the 'right hand of the Father' the risen Lord revealed himself to his disciples, confirming them in the significance of his cross and resurrection for their lives, as well as their new identity and mission as his Church.
- The gift of the Holy Spirit upon the community of disciples was given as the fruit of the passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The Church is not merely a human institution; she is the work of God. The Church's very identity, life and mission, all come from the continued presence, action and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
- Christians, parishes, dioceses, the Church as a whole, are not to live their lives for themselves, but for Jesus Christ and for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Christians, parishes, dioceses, the whole Church, are inherently missionary and called to mission.

For our shared or personal reflection:

After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.

- What does the ascension of the Lord signify in my life as a Christian?
- How aware am I of the Spirit's presence, anointing and power in my life and in my parish? Do I consider the Sacrament of Confirmation as an event of the past, or as an anointing of the Spirit that is a permanent reality in my life calling me to witness and to mission?
- How can I contribute to the mission of the Church in my parish and to its sense of mission? Does my parish have a sense of mission, both within itself and beyond itself to the community at large and even beyond to people in need in our world?

Suggested readings: Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 659-73