

THE SAVING WORD

THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD / A

24 MAY 2020

FIRST READING

Acts 1:1-11

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

Why are you standing here looking into the sky?

Jesus has been taken into heaven.

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 of 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.'

■ The word of the Lord.



RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 46:2-3, 6-9. R. v. 6

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

1. 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.**

2. 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.**

3. 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.**

SECOND READING

Eph 1:17-23

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians

He made Jesus to sit at his right hand in heaven.

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a spirit of wisdom and perception of what is revealed, to bring you to full knowledge of him. May he enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you can see what hope his call holds for you, what rich glories he has promised the saints will inherit and how infinitely great is the power that he has

Reflections on the Gospel

exercised for us believers. This you can tell from the strength of his power at work in Christ, when he used it to raise him from the dead and to make him sit at his right hand, in heaven, far above every Sovereignty, Authority, Power, or Domination, or any other name that can be named, not only in this age, but also in the age to come. He has put all things under his feet, and made him as the ruler of everything, the head of the Church; which is his body, the fullness of him who fills the whole creation.

■ The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Mt 28:19, 20

Alleluia, alleluia! / Go and teach all people my gospel. I am with you always, until the end of the world. / Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Mt 28:16-20

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

The eleven disciples set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. When they saw him they fell down before him, though some hesitated. Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'

■ The Gospel of the Lord.

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UNFINISHED BUSINESS, ... BUT HOPE

Having escaped the clutches of his enemies by rising from the dead, the Lord ascends, like the prophet Elijah, to heaven.

In biblical language and imagery this manner of describing the close of Jesus' earthly ministry signals that the One who had been crucified on the trumped-up charge of being a political Messiah has now entered into his true messianic glory at God's right hand.

This entrance into heavenly glory does not mean that Jesus abandons either his disciples or his saving mission in the world. Rather, he will continue to exercise that mission through the ministry of the Church, empowered (at Pentecost) by the same Spirit that rested upon him.

Just before he departs, the disciples voice an understandable concern: 'Lord, has the time come? Are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' The query betrays a strong sense of 'unfinished business'. Despite the Easter victory, forces hostile to God and to true humanity continue to hold sway in the world – as the disciples, and we ourselves, remain acutely aware.

Jesus does not give a direct answer. The time of the Kingdom's full arrival remains shrouded in the mystery of God. The disciples' task, meanwhile, is to take up the messianic mission of Jesus, bringing the hope of the resurrection to an often despairing world.

The Ascension is not, then, simply something that happened to Jesus. As the Preface of the Mass says so well, he 'has passed beyond our sight, not to abandon us but to be our hope; where he has gone, we hope to follow'.

Brendan Byrne, SJ