

Ascension of the Lord – 2018

Acts 1: 1-11 Ephesians 1: 17-23 Mark 16: 15-20

Of the different accounts given in the Scriptures about the Ascension of Jesus, the one we heard from the Acts of the Apostles today is the one which is probably remembered best. This is because it appears to give a visual report of the event. It has been the basis for many great art works about the departure of Jesus.



While it is easy to envision the event of the Ascension from the report that is given by St. Luke in the Acts, there are actually varied ways in which that departure of the Lord is reported by the different Scriptural writers. In fact, St. Luke gives two accounts of this departure. At the end of the Gospel of Luke it is simply stated that Jesus blessed his followers and was parted from them and carried off to

heaven. At the beginning of the Acts, as we heard, his account is far more detailed.

As for the other Gospel writers, John, for one, says nothing about the Ascension. Matthew speaks only about the commission to make disciples of all nations. In the Gospel of Mark, as we heard today, and as we are told by those who have studied and analyzed the Scriptures, the passage that I read was probably not part of the original composition but was added later and accepted as part of the Gospel. It, too, focuses on the commission given to the followers of Jesus. It also confirms that Jesus reigns with authority and that he will guide and

protect those who go out and proclaim the Gospel.

So, rather than be confused about these apparently different presentations of the Ascension, it is the truth they convey that is to be considered: the physical presence of the Word of God, Jesus Christ, was no longer to be experienced. His work of revealing God and bringing on a reconciliation with God is completed. He has returned to God, as the Gospel of St. Mark relates, in power and glory having done what he was to do.

But that is not the end of the story. Luke had closed his Gospel account by indicating that Jesus had completed his ministry. But Luke began anew, in the Acts of the Apostles, with the task of that ministry being taken on by the followers of Jesus. That task has continued over the centuries until now and is to be taken over by us. It is clearly pointed out that gazing up to the heavens, longing for what had been, was useless. Now was the time to get on with the job of proclaiming the Gospel to all the world, to all nations.

Essentially, as believers in the teaching and message of Jesus Christ we celebrate and were called, on this feast of the Ascension, that his work as coming into our world is finished. But Christ's work, through us, as the Body of Christ in our world, is now begun. We are not on our own as we make the effort to do this, however.

How, then, is this work to be carried out? We can find an answer in the thoughts of St. Paul that we have heard today. He suggests two different points on which we can examine ourselves. One is that we are to strive to live lives that are virtuous, that reflect a genuine effort to believe in the goodness of God and to make that goodness truly a part of our lives. We do this by showing a humility that is honest, a gentleness that is true, a patience and a peace that is

genuine. We can ask ourselves if these qualities are found in our lives and are these qualities reflective of the way we really want to be. The second thought is that we are to live in a way that actively and positively builds up the well-being of this community we are as Church. Does our living of the Faith truly enhance what we are to be as the Body of Christ in the world?

We are not to stand around idly gazing at the sky. The commission of Jesus Christ, who lived, died and then overcame death in resurrection, has been given to us. The moments of expressing our faith are not just those we have spent here today. The moments of expressing our faith have only begun here as we are commissioned at every mass in which we join to go forth into our world. We are to go forth and live in ways that reflect presence of faith in Christ in us, to live in ways that encourage and enhance lives of fellow believers, and to live in ways that what is revealed by us and to our world is our truly good & gracious God