

## Closing Prayer

Risen Christ,  
you have raised our human nature to the throne of heaven:  
help us to seek and serve you,  
that we may join you at the Father's side,  
where you reign with the Spirit in glory,  
now and for ever.

CW · Additional Collects · Ascension Day

## Ascension Day

### Principal Service readings

*The reading from Acts must be used as either the first or second reading*

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Acts 1.1-11       | The ascension                                      |
| or Daniel 7.9-14  | the vision of the venerable one and the son of man |
| Psalm 47          | The Lord, the king of the whole world              |
| or Psalm 93       | The Lord is king                                   |
| Ephesians 1.15-23 | Paul's prayer                                      |
| or Acts 1.1-11    | The ascension                                      |
| Luke 24.44-53     | Final instructions; the ascension                  |

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

### Gospel Reading

#### *Final instructions and ascension*

<sup>44</sup> Jesus said to the disciples, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.' <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup> and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'

<sup>50</sup> Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; <sup>53</sup> and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Luke 24.44-53 NRSV<sup>1</sup>

## Comments and Questions

Today's reading begins in the middle of an event. Jesus has appeared in the midst of the disciples and wished them peace (24.36). They are frightened by his appearance and think he might be a ghost. He has shown them his hands and his feet, we infer with the marks of the nails since Luke doesn't actually mention these. Why doesn't Luke mention the nails? Jesus even eats some fish with them; it perhaps reminds us of the feeding of the multitude in 9.16. Yes, it is really Jesus.

He speaks to them again about the scriptures (24.45), just as he had on the road to Emmaus (24.27). Jesus shows them that the scriptures are being fulfilled. From v.47 Luke orients the narrative towards his second volume, Acts. He now anticipates the narrative that is to follow and places it, too, under the guidance of scripture. In a programmatic prophecy Jesus says there will be a proclamation of repentance for forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name to all the nations. The gospel narrative had moved towards Jerusalem. Now the narrative of Acts will move out from it. The disciples will be more than 'eyewitnesses', they will be ministers of the word.

The blessing that Luke writes about is not the blessing of a fruitful land but the blessing of the Holy Spirit. The 'power from on high' is the Holy Spirit. We can note the similarity with the beginning of the gospel, where in the scene of the annunciation Mary is told: 'the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power from on high will overshadow you' (1.58).

v.50 lifting up your hands and blessing is a combination associated with a priest (cf. Simeon in Luke 2.34), as when Aaron raises his hands and blesses the people (Leviticus 9.22). Jesus is 'carried up into heaven' (24.51). The ascension is rarely portrayed pictorially. How do you imagine it? There is more detail given in the account in Acts: 'he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight' (Acts 1.9). The disciples return to Jerusalem with 'great joy'. Joy is a distinctive signifier of a state of messianic exaltation and peace (1.14; 2.10; 8.13; 10.17; 15.7,10). The disciples return to Jerusalem in obedience to Jesus' instruction. Why do they carry on worshipping in the temple? What do you think is going through their minds as they await the 'power from on high'?

## Quotations

### 1

At his Ascension our Lord entered Heaven, and he keeps the door open for humanity to enter.

Oswald Chambers, 1874–1917

### 2

Christ is already in that place of peace, which is all in all. He is on the right hand of God. He is hidden in the brightness of the radiance which issues from the everlasting throne. He is in the very abyss of peace, where there is no voice of tumult or distress, but a deep stillness – stillness, that greatest and most awful of all goods which we can fancy; that most perfect of joys, the utter profound, ineffable tranquillity of the Divine Essence. He has entered into his rest. That is our home; here we are on a pilgrimage, and Christ calls us to his many mansions which he has prepared.

St John Henry Newman, 1801–1890

### 3

[A]s the Ascension of Jesus formed a crisis in the worship of Heaven, so was it also on earth. 'They worshipped him' – his very withdrawal from among them, his very elevation to the throne of God, was the development of new relations between the disciples and their Lord. As long as he was on earth the worship of him was not the principal feature of their life; but as soon as he was withdrawn for them and seated at God's right hand in the heavenly places, the adoration of the Lamb, – the worship of Jesus incarnate, crucified, risen, ascended, enthroned, – the distinctive worship of the Christian Church began to be.

George Body, 1840–1911

## Related topics

*For further study:*

Ascension; paschal mystery; christology; Trinity; Holy Spirit; Christian witness; sacraments; baptism; confirmation; Eucharist; penance; orders; marriage; symbols: light, water, cross, oil, bread, wine; laying on of hands; assembly.