

Ascension B

First Reading Acts 1:1-11

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 to 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."

Second Reading Ephesians 1:17-23

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 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.

Gospel Mark 16:15-20

Jesus showed himself to the Eleven, and said to them, "Go out to the whole world, proclaim the Good News to all creation. He who believes and is baptised will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned. These are the signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils; they will have the gift of tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and be unharmed should they drink deadly poison; they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover." And so the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven: there at the right hand of God he took his place, while they, going out, preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that accompanied it.

Meditation

The Ascension is one facet of the rich Easter mystery. The reading from Acts relates the event of Jesus leaving his apostles. As a natural or supernatural phenomenon, it certainly merits considerable fascination. Yet the New Testament leaves us without details. We too can gaze up into the heavens and wonder about the Ascension, but this day is not really about a departure. It is a day that unfolds the promise that Jesus will return. It reminds us that Jesus is with us always.

Indeed Christ is the vibrant head of the Church which is his body. We do not observe a departure. We celebrate a presence. Thus this day in the fifty-day sweep of Easter is a peculiarly opportune time for relishing our hope and status. We can discover Christ's presence at every turn, renew our flagging spirits with tastes of the kingdom. It simply takes eyes of faith, our innermost vision that sees the great hope, glorious heritage, and immeasurable scope of Christ's power.

We should approach this day with open hearts. We do not gather at eucharist to have the Ascension explained or to memorize exegetical points. We come to be inspired, to offer praise, proclaim the risen One who never leaves us.