

Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord

May 28, 2017



*Gladden us with holy joys, almighty God,
and make us rejoice with devout thanksgiving,
for the Ascension of Christ, your Son,
is our exultation, and,
where the Head has gone before in glory,
the Body is called to follow in hope.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*



Collect for the Solemnity of the Ascension

The Fifty Days of Easter is quickly coming to a close as we celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord.

Imagine being a friend of Jesus, having been called and journeyed with him over the three years of his public ministry. Then they went through the horrors of the crucifixion. These friends were filled with fear at the time of his arrest and crucifixion, some denying him, some standing at the foot of the cross, one even committing suicide. The one who



committed suicide was so despairing, because he had Jesus turned over to the Jewish authorities who were then responsible for sending him to the Roman authorities. The Roman leadership, fearful of Caesar, gave permission for the crucifixion. After the crucifixion these friends locked themselves into rooms for fear that the same thing would happen to them. All this enables us to see the destruction that fear allows.

The women who had followed Jesus, who did not seem fearful, after the sabbath and Passover were over, went to the tomb only to find it empty. Each one of the four Evangelists put a different spin on the telling of the Resurrection. Regardless, the tomb was empty and Jesus was appearing to many of them, his followers. For forty days Jesus went about being with his friends and teaching them because he knew that shortly he was returning to the Father. It seemed that the eleven thought differently. They did not understand the entire mystery of the Resurrection, but they just knew that Jesus was with them again.

Finally, obediently, they went out of Jerusalem to Galilee, as Jesus said to the women who found the empty tomb, *"Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee,*

and there they will see me." (Matthew 28:10)

Succinctly, from the first reading from Acts we hear:

*When they had gathered together they asked him,
"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"
He answered them, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons
that the Father has established by his own authority.
But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you,
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem,
throughout Judea and Samaria,
and to the ends of the earth."*

*When he had said this, as they were looking on,
he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight.
While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going,
suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them.*

*They said, "Men of Galilee,
why are you standing there looking at the sky?
This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven
will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven."*

(Acts 1:6-11)



Reflecting on this reading we see that the eleven still were unclear about the mission of Jesus. Israel was an occupied country and they were hoping that he would restore the kingdom of Israel. (This past week, our President, Donald Trump, visited the sites of the great religions of the Muslims, Jews and Christianity. He hoped radicals could be stopped, bring peace to all of us. Still, the horror of the bombing in Manchester England showed much healing had to happen, ridding us of fanatic hatred and fear.) In the hope of the eleven, the Romans would be driven out. Jesus had other ideas and as he had told them, (John 14-17), their power would come from the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God is different from what the eleven envisioned. If each of us in the world could let God be in control, peace would happen.

Biblically, a theophany happens on mountain tops. If we recall, Moses received the covenant on Mount Sinai; Jesus renewed this covenant in his teachings on the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5-7) (In the Sacrament of Marriage, couples, as the ministers of the Sacrament, seal their lives with a covenant.) Now, on a mountain, Jesus was lifted up on a cloud and disappeared from their sight. As at the empty tomb, two men, dressed in white spoke to them as Jesus was no longer in their midst. (Luke 24:1-8)

The gospel for today does not speak of the Ascension. Jesus gives the eleven disciples

(and us) a commission to continue his work. Even at this time they gave Jesus his due, allowing his greatness (worth-ship) to be a reality. Even though they worshipped they still doubted.

*“All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit,
teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.
And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”*
(Matthew 28:18-20)

Leaving the mountaintop, they went a Sabbath day walk back to Jerusalem and went into the upper room and waited. Then the coming of the Spirit would give them power to go forth baptizing and teaching.

For each of us we too await the gifts of the Spirit. This happens for us in the Sacrament of Confirmation and we continually renew the gifts of Baptism. Each time we received the Sacrament of Reconciliation, though we do not use these words, are what we are renewing. These are the questions to which we respond *I do* at Easter and were said for us at our Baptism.

- † *Do you reject sin, so as to live in the freedom of God's children?*
- † *Do you reject the glamor of evil, and refuse to be mastered by sin?*
- † *Do you reject Satan, father of sin and prince of darkness?*
- † *Do you reject sin, so as to live in the freedom of God's children?*
- † *Do you reject the glamor of evil, and refuse to be mastered by sin?*
- † *Do you reject Satan, father of sin and prince of darkness?*

Renewing the purity of our baptism we are then able to go out to the whole world to baptize and teach as Jesus asked us.

From now until next Sunday we can pray for the gifts of the Spirit:

*O Holy Spirit, bestow upon us Your seven holy gifts.
Enlighten our understanding that we may know You.
Give us wisdom that Your will may be clear to us
and that we may accept it.
Grant us the gift of counsel
that we may always perceive what is right.
Fortify us that we may always be capable
of fulfilling Your Divine Will.
Inspire us with the spirit of learning
that we may be able to penetrate more deeply
into the truths that You have revealed.*

Let our hearts be steeped in the spirit of childlikenes that we may bring You joy.

*Let us have proper fear of God
that we may never grieve You
or wander from the path of goodness.
Give us the fullness of Your gifts
that we may glorify You. Amen.*

<http://www.catholicdoors.com/prayers/novenas/p00012.htm>

As we pray for the Spirit we need to reflect on the gifts of the Spirit. This will aid us as we deepen our lives as contemporary disciples. We then strengthen our sense of what each gift gives us.

- † *Understanding* keeps us in touch with the big picture of what Jesus calls the ‘good news’ and with how everything in life is part of it.
- † *Wisdom* involves getting an in-depth appreciation of what is most important in life as this gives all else meaning and worth.
- † *Knowledge* finds that all things are signs of, and thus puts us in touch with what is central to life.
- † *Fear of the Lord* governs our basic response to God being both transcendent and immanent, being Lord as well as lover.
- † *Piety* enables us to immerse ourselves in the reality of God being Lover and Lord so that we surrender to him our whole person, body and soul, mind and heart.
- † *Fortitude* gives us the courage to face the forces inside and outside of ourselves that make it difficult for us to believe that God is lover and Lord.
- † *Counsel* enables us to discern in concrete situations how to live consistently with what we believe in.

(A World Alight with Splendor, Peter Hamman, SJ; page 107; c. 2008)

Spending time with the reflection, we can use each gift to conquer our sinfulness and grow in virtue, ready to grow in our discipleship.

GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT	CAPITAL SINS	VIRTUES
Wisdom	Pride	Humility – Faith
Knowledge	Anger	Justice
Counsel	Gluttony	Prudence
Piety	Envy	Hope
Fortitude	Sloth	Fortitude
Understanding	Lust	Love
Fear of the Lord	Avarice	Temperance

May our hearts be ready for the coming of the Spirit.