

# Reflection for the Solemnity of the Ascension, Cycle C

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The lectionary translation of the readings for this Sunday can be found at <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/060125-Ascension.cfm>

## **1st Reading:** *Acts 1:1–11*

Like the Gospel of Luke, Acts is addressed to Theophilus which was a common name at the time of Jesus but also a title. It means, literally, friend of God or beloved of God. The selection we have today is part of the prologue which connects Acts to Luke and describes the Ascension in a little more detail than the Gospel does. Like the Gospel, this passage gives the Church the mission of witnessing to Jesus. It also announces the Second Coming at the end of time.

## **2nd Reading:** *Ephesians 1:17–23*

At the beginning of the letter to the Church in Ephesus, Paul praises the Ephesians for their faith and love for each other. He praises God and offers this prayer for them.

## **Alternative 2nd Reading:** *Hebrews 9:24–28*

In this selection, Paul compares Jesus, the eternal High Priest, to the High Priest in Jerusalem. The Eternal High Priest only needed one sacrifice and it was in his own blood. Also, note that the Jewish people considered the temple in Jerusalem to be a copy of God's temple in heaven.

## **Gospel:** *Luke 24:46–53*

You are witnesses of these things. And [behold] I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Lk24:48-49

## **Gospel Reflection**

### **Witnessing Through Testimony of Life**

One of the parishioners of St. Luke, in El Cajon, saw a sign one day while he was travelling. The sign was at the parking lot exit of a church and was erected so you could see it as you were leaving. It said, "You are now entering the mission field." We liked it so much that he paid to have similar signs erected at the exits to St. Luke's parking lot. It importantly points out, and it's important for us to recognize, that we are a Church sent on mission. We are not just people who go to Church, we are a Church who goes to people.

Many people don't seem to realize that the Catholic Mass is all about being sent on mission. It got its name from the final act of the Mass which is the deacon proclaiming what in Latin is rendered *Ite missa est*. There are four translations offered for that in the Roman Missal but a literal translation would be "Go, it is sent", the "it" being Christ the sacrificial victim, as Thomas Aquinas says (*Summa III*, 84, 4 ad9), the Body of Christ, or the Church, however you want to say it. The Catechism of the Catholic Church points out that the Mass is called "Holy Mass (*Missae*), because the liturgy... concludes with the sending forth (*missio*) of the faithful, so that they may fulfill God's will in their daily lives." (CCC 1332)

The Roman Missal calls this “the dismissal” and many people seem to believe it means, “We’re done here. You can go home now.” But, we are not done. It’s not a passive dismissal. We are being dismissed to carry out the mission of the Church, God’s will, which today’s Gospel selection tells us is being witnessed to Jesus. That is our mission as described by Luke. Remember, in John 20:21, Jesus tells us “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

So how are we supposed to witness? The Vatican II document on the Apostolate of the Laity has a section showing how parents are witnesses to the Lord for their children. We do it by example, discipline (leading to self-discipline), encouragement and teaching. But we don’t only witness to our children. At the very least we should live a life that is an example to the world, what the Church calls witness of life. St. Francis is supposed to have commented about that. He purportedly said, “Preach the Gospel at all times, in all places, and, if necessary use your voice. If the way we live our life is consciously based on witnessing to Christ, we’ve made a good start.

Bringing Gospel values into our conversations can be witnessing to the Lord also, as long as we have the loving attitude toward others which Christ has. We shouldn’t be preachy or condemnatory; he wasn’t. We just need to hold up the good as a viable alternative in this world that seems too open to antagonistic relationships. What is the loving way to address societies goals and problems?

And, if you want, you can get involved in ministries available in your parish or diocese. This could be faith formation programs or outreach to those with various needs. The idea is to be an instance of God’s love to others, modeling Jesus’ way and, thereby, witnessing to him.

So remember, whenever we go to Mass, we are going to “the missioning”, which is what the whole Mass is about. The final act is us being sent out into the mission fields to witness to Christ. If we can consciously celebrate the Mass as the missioning and intentionally live our lives witnessing to Christ, our lives will have meaning beyond what we have ever dreamed.

God bless...

### **Personal Reflection:**

You are witnesses of these things. And [behold] I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” Lk24:48-49

### **Question:**

What words or phrases attracted your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? Why do you think they attracted your attention? What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

### **Alternative:**

Reflect upon/Share how you think people would describe you from their observations on how you live your life. To what, or whom, would they think you are witnessing. How close is this to what witnessing to Jesus would look like? What can you do so that your manner of life more clearly witnesses to Jesus?

### Setting and parallels:

The Gospel of Mark has a shorter form, Mk 16-19. Both Mark's version and Luke's version seem to occur on the day of Resurrection. Matthew's Gospel ends with the commissioning to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19-20). It does not record the Ascension. John's Gospel also does not record the Ascension and he tells of the commissioning and giving of the Spirit in the story of his appearance to the disciples in the locked room (Jn 20:21-22).

### Verse by Verse:

Lk 24:47 "...repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name..." | The Greek *tha* we have translated as "repentance" is *metanoian* which is more than simply being sorry for sins. It is a change of heart and a change of ways.

The word translated as "sins" *hamartiōn* which means not being perfect, missing the mark. It does not necessarily imply willful disobedience.

The word translated as "forgiveness" literally means "sending off". This reminds me of the Yom Kippur scapegoat, Leviticus 16:8-10, upon which the sins of the community are ritually placed. It is sent off to the wilderness as the community begins a fresh start.

Lk 24:48 "You are witnesses to these things." The word translated as "witness", *martures*, is the root for our word martyr. It signifies the action of someone who testifies rather than a passive witness. It refers to future testifying. It is connected to v.47 by way of explaining how the preaching is going to happen; the preaching of repentance (change of ways) would be preached by a testifier to Jesus' ministry of reconciliation.

Lk 24:49a "And behold I am sending the promise of my Father..." | This was prophesied in Joel 2:27-3:1a. It may have been prophesied in other places, but this is the one I know.

Lk 24:49b "stay in the city until you are clothed from power on high." | Our witnessing is to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, not by our own spirit.