

## Easter 7 / Ascension Observed / May 29, 2022

### Acts 1:11

*“This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.”*

#### Jesus will come again

Ascension is the 40<sup>th</sup> day of Jesus' resurrection and marks the conclusion of His earthly ministry. His earthly pilgrimage began in humble form, with His mysterious conception by the Holy Spirit and birth in a stable, through the blessed virgin Mary. He completed His journey in simple form. He walked with the disciples a short distance, commissioned them to be His witnesses, was lifted up and taken from their sight. Heaven rejoiced, but on earth there was no fanfare or sound of celebration.

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus said to the disciples, *“The days are coming, when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.”* Those days had begun. Long after Jesus had vanished from their sight, the disciples stared longingly at the sky. Their gaze and the tableaux of the moment were broken by the voice of angels who said, *“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.”*

He was gone, yet He remained with them. He was in their hearts through faith. He was among them through His Spirit. He continued to speak to them through the Spirit, who would bring His words to their remembrance. They would be His witnesses and though at times they may have felt lonely, they were never alone. When He commissioned them, He promised His continuing presence, saying, *“I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* They wouldn't see Him as before, but they would see Him.

They would see Him and others would see and believe through their witness, including me and you. One day all who believe through their witness, will see Him in bodily form. As the angels said *“This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way you saw Him go into heaven.”* We see Him now through faith. One day we will see Him with our own eyes, face to face!

Ascension is not the sad commemoration of the departure of Christ. It is not a requiem mass, in which we mourn His absence. Ascension is the remembrance of His continuing presence in the fellowship of believers, through word and sacrament. Ascension is the celebration of His enhanced presence with the Church through the Holy Spirit, whom He has given to all of us. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, He ascended above the heavens that He might fill all things. He fills the Church with His Spirit. He makes the bodies of believers His holy temples. With His ascension the Church sees Him through faith. This is important. There is nothing more pleasing to God than faith. He wants us to have faith in Christ. Jesus said, *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* Those who see Him through faith will see Him with their eyes, when He returns on the clouds at the right hand of the Father.

We experience Him through His Spirit as members of His body, the holy Christian Church. He speaks to us in His word. He cleanses us of sins through the continuous washing of our baptism. He is present with His body and blood in the sacrament of the altar. Through this meal of remembrance, He feeds our spirits and nourishes our faith with the forgiveness of sins. He joins us in our gatherings. He said, *“Where two or three are gathered in my name I am there with them.”* He walks with us through the fellowship of the faithful. The Church is His body on earth. We see Him now through faith. One day we will see Him face to face. What was hidden from our sight with His ascension will be revealed to our eyes in our share of His resurrection. Jesus will come again in the same way He was taken into heaven.

In the forty days following His death and resurrection, Jesus appeared in physical form to the body of believers and to the apostles in particular. They would be His witnesses; through them He would begin to gather believers from all nations. Luke says in the beginning of Acts, *“To them He presented Himself alive after His suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.”* Read the gospels and you will see that Jesus often spoke about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is His righteous reign in the world, which begins in the human heart when we receive Jesus as Saviour through faith in His name.

The kingdom of God is not a physical place as the disciples imagined and seemed to continue to believe, asking as Jesus departed, *“Lord will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”* The kingdom of God is His reign in the human spirit, through which He claims us from the control of the devil, by which He forgives our sins and seeks to drown the sinful nature that remains within us by returning us to the water of our baptism. God brings us

into His kingdom by His word through the washing of baptism. He will fulfill His good work in us, when Jesus returns on the clouds and He gives us a share in His resurrection to life everlasting.

The Church sees Jesus by faith, through the witness of the apostles. The world sees Jesus through the witness of the Church. The last time Jesus appeared in bodily form to the world was when He hung dying on the cross. When He arose, Jesus appeared only to the apostles and other believers. He appeared only to believers, because it is through the church that He has chosen to make Himself known to the world as its God and Saviour.

When terrible things happen people ask where in the world is God? Where is God? He is in the world through the body of believers, who bear the name of Christ and who hold Him in their hearts as Saviour. Be assured that Jesus is present whenever something terrible happens, wherever it happens. He is present throughout the earth through believers who reach out healing hands to the injured, grieve with those who mourn, pray for those who are broken-hearted and who speak words of forgiveness and hope in His name to those who are broken by sin. No matter where trouble is Jesus is there. He has people on the ground before the cameras arrive. They remain there, offering hope and healing in His name, long after the world has forgotten and moved on. Jesus is in the world through the Church!

The most important way Jesus makes Himself known to the world through the Church, is in the proclamation of the saving gospel. Jesus ascended high above the heavens, so that He would fill the Church with His Spirit and empower believers to be present in the world as His heart to love, His hands to help and as His voice to speak to the gospel of salvation. The gospel of salvation is the good news that God does not hold the world's sin against it. Jesus paid everyone's debt and atoned for the sin of the whole world.

The gospel of salvation is the good news that we do not reach up to God through our good works, but that God reaches out to all of us with forgiveness, through the good work Jesus offered through His life and sacrificial death on the cross. The gospel of salvation is the good news that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, receive a share in Christ's resurrection and a place in a world where sin, death and the devil are no more.

Jesus calls to the world through the voice of the Church. The world hears Jesus speak in the gospel. The world sees Jesus through the body of believers. As believers, each one of us has a purpose in this world to make Jesus known. We have this purpose as long as we draw our breath. We fulfill His purpose by the words we speak, the way we live and the way we die. We are His witnesses.

We hear His voice in scripture. He supports us through our fellowship as believers. We see Him in one another. He is present when we gather. He nourishes and refreshes us through the sacraments. He is with us always. Now we see Him through faith. When He returns on the clouds with the angels at the right hand of the Father, we will see His face. As Jesus said to the disciples the night He was betrayed, in that day we will rejoice and no one will take our joy from us for all eternity. God bless us with His Spirit and keep us to that day. In Jesus' Name. Amen