

## **The Ascension of the Lord Ascension - Lectionary: 58**

### **Reading 1 - [Acts 1:1-11](#)**

In the first book, Theophilus, I dealt with all that Jesus did and taught until the day he was taken up, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them by many proofs after he had suffered, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While meeting with them, he enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for “the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak; for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

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.”

**Responsorial Psalm - [Psalm 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9](#) - R. (6) God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord.**

### **Reading 2 - [Ephesians 1:17-23](#)**

Brothers and sisters: May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might, which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens, far above every principality, authority, power, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.

### **Gospel - [Matthew 28:16-20](#)**

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, “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.”



## Summary

The Ascension of Christ is not a symbolic farewell or a mere historical bridge, but a decisive exaltation that marks the fulfillment of Christ's earthly mission and the definitive beginning of the "Age of the Church." It is the "lynchpin" of salvation history, bridging Christ's redemptive work on the cross with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Central to this event is the emergence of the Church from its "birth"—rooted in Christ's sacrifice—to its "advent," its visible emergence as a missionary body. The Ascension establishes Christ's enthronement at the right hand of the Father, where he exercises authority and permanent priestly intercession. For the believer, the Ascension provides a theological foundation for hope, a participation in the divine life, and a mandate for a missionary identity that is not optional but intrinsic to the Christian life. The Church is established not as an institution of self-preservation, but as the "universal sacrament of salvation".

## The Ascension of Christ & The Advent of the Church

The Church has both an 'advent', a coming / establishment in history, and a 'birth', its origin in Christ's saving work. Two different aspects of one paschal mystery. The Second Vatican Council described the Church as "*the Light of Nations*," a unified body whose life comes from Christ and is kept alive and active by the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> That means what we call the Church's 'birth', its coming-to-life in salvation history is ultimately Christ-centered, because the Church is founded by Christ. We speak of the 'birth' of the Church as being rooted in the flow of blood and water from the side of Christ, and Pentecost when the Church is visibly constituted as the Spirit-filled community that can evangelize and gather peoples. What we call the Church's 'advent', its visible emergence and public mission in history, is Spirit-centered, because the Church is sustained by the Holy Spirit. The Ascension of Christ is the so-called lynchpin in the 'birth' of the Church since it is necessary for the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. So, Ascension and Pentecost

<sup>1</sup> Vatican Council II. *Lumen Gentium*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1964.

[https://www.vatican.va/archive/histcouncils/iiivatican council/documents/vat-iiconst19641121lumen-gentium\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/histcouncils/iiivatican council/documents/vat-iiconst19641121lumen-gentium_en.html).

fit naturally into a single framework: Ascension is part of Christ's saving exaltation that grounds the gift of the Spirit, while Pentecost is the Spirit's outpouring that makes the Church's life and mission visibly operative.

The Ascension of Christ marks the beginning of the age of the Church and speaks to its identity as universal sacrament of salvation<sup>2</sup> and missionary.<sup>3</sup> The advent of the Church, its foundation in the event of Christ's ascension to the right hand of the father, points to how the Church appears, takes shape, and begins to act publicly as a community sent to the world. The Ascension establishes Christ's enthronement and lordship ("right hand of the Father"). The enthroned Christ sends the promised Holy Spirit, who comes to the disciples at Pentecost. The Spirit forms Christ's Mystical Body, the Church, as universal sacrament of salvation—sign and instrument through which the Spirit dispenses Christ's saving mystery. Because the Church possesses this fullness in Christ, she is missionary by nature, sent to all peoples with a permanent evangelizing mission.

The whole significance of Christ's Ascension, as stated above, is summarized for us in the Scripture readings this weekend. In them we see that the Ascension is not an abstract idea or convenient literary bridge—it is a concrete historical event which concludes the post resurrection appearances of Jesus. Because Christ has gone to the Father, Christians live in hope: the head has preceded the members of his Body, and therefore believers can confidently hope to be with him.<sup>4</sup> They speak of the mystery in which the risen Jesus, in his real glorified humanity, definitively enters God's heavenly domain and is seated upon the throne of his majesty as King,<sup>5</sup> and is also the start of his permanent priestly intercession: he "*entered... into heaven itself... to appear in the presence of God on our behalf,*" and "*always lives to make intercession.*"<sup>6</sup> It bears repeating - because Christ has gone to the Father, Christians live in hope: the head has preceded the members of his Body, and therefore believers can confidently hope to be with him.<sup>7</sup>

The Ascension of Christ marks the fulfillment of his mission among us.<sup>8</sup> It begins a new definitive presence and makes possible for us to be participants in the divine life.<sup>9</sup> He "brings" humanity to God. Because of the Ascension, the Holy Spirit is sent, and Christ's witnesses are empowered: we are not left with anxiety but given "power" and "courage" for testimony. That combination—hope + presence + Spirit-empowered mission—is strongly represented across the Ascension-related texts and translates naturally to our real existential questions about purpose, loneliness, and the future. We are reminded of the power and authority of Christ and that as Christians, we have this authority, in Christ. Invoking the name of Jesus, the name above all names, we have power and authority over temptation. It is in his power and authority, enabled by the Holy Spirit, that we are enabled to listen to him with understanding and do what he says with clarity and conviction.<sup>10</sup>

The Apostles were being called to fully embrace their mission, in fact the very missionary identity of the Church in the midst of its emergence, and therefore to fulfill it according to the instructions given them,

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Vatican Council II. *Ad Gentes*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/histcouncils/iivaticancouncil/documents/vat-ii-decree19651207ad-gentes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/histcouncils/iivaticancouncil/documents/vat-ii-decree19651207ad-gentes_en.html)

<sup>4</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992. § 665. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM).

<sup>5</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992. § 667. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM).

<sup>6</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992. § 663. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM).

<sup>7</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992. § 664. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM).

<sup>8</sup> Ecclesially, the ascension implies that the Church now begins to function as the visible embodiment of Jesus. With the ascension the time of the Church begins, marked by the gift of the Spirit and by Christian response to the Spirit in service of the Reign of God. It is through the Spirit of the glorified Christ, "the promise of my Father" (Luke 24:49) that the disciples are empowered to go out and proclaim the Good News. Michael Glazier and Monika K. Hellwig, *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 52.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992. § 662. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM).

<sup>10</sup> Pope John Paul II. *Homily at Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979. <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hfjp-iihom19790524seminari-ingl-roma.html>.

instructions which were in turn the faithful expression of the Father's will for the salvation of the world. The instructions included that the Apostles do nothing immediately but first they are to wait for the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus would send, the final necessary element for the 'birth' of the Church. From the beginning Christ was clear that the source of the Apostles' strength, power, authority would be the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who guides the Church in the way of truth; the Gospel is to spread through the power of God, and not by means of human wisdom or strength.

The Apostles, moreover, were instructed to teach – to proclaim the Good News to the whole world. And they were to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Like Jesus, they were to speak explicitly about the Kingdom of God and about salvation. The Apostles were to give witness to Christ to the ends of the earth. The early Church clearly understood these instructions and the missionary era began. *“The Church's self-realization in its action is essentially “missionary,” inasmuch as mission is not merely a certain task in history, but a structural feature of the Church's nature at every time and in each place. The Church's self-realization is thus essentially directed to those who do not yet belong to the Church and who are to find their way to it.”*<sup>11</sup> The Church is not primarily oriented to self-preservation, but to grow and to conquer the world according to Jesus' command: *“Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature”*.<sup>12</sup>

Jesus emphasizes the responsibility to generously live, be the mission in accord with their love for and commitment to him: *“You shall be my witnesses”*.<sup>13</sup> To the apostles he entrusts the task of spreading the Gospel throughout the world, spurring them to abandon their narrow vision limited to Israel.<sup>14</sup> He broadens their horizons, inviting them to be his witnesses *“in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth”*.<sup>15</sup> Thus, everything will happen in Christ's name, but not without the personal work of these witnesses. The disciples could shrink from this demanding mission, judging themselves incapable of assuming such a serious responsibility. But Jesus shows them the secret that will enable them to fulfil this task: *“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you”*.<sup>16</sup> With this power the disciples will succeed, despite human weakness, in being authentic witnesses of Christ throughout the world.<sup>17</sup>

We are reminded today of the power and authority of Christ that we possess, as the members of his mystical body. Invoking the name of Jesus, the name above all names, we have power and authority over the enemy and are enabled to exercise reason over passion in ourselves. It is in his power and authority, enabled by the Holy Spirit, that we are enabled to listen to him with understanding and do what he says with clarity, conviction, and courage.<sup>18</sup>

Pope Saint John Paul II speaks to all of us when he says, *“Yes, dear sons [and daughters], our greatest challenge is to be faithful to the instructions of the Lord Jesus. The Church may indeed experience difficulties, the Gospel may suffer setbacks, but because Jesus is at the right-hand of the Father the Church will never know defeat. Christ's victory is ours. The power of the glorified Christ, the beloved Son of the eternal Father, is superabundant, to sustain each of us and all of us in the fidelity of our dedication to God's Kingdom. The efficacy of Christ's Ascension touches all of us in the concrete reality of our daily lives. Because of this mystery it is the vocation of the whole Church to wait in joyful hope for the coming of our*

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<sup>11</sup> Johann Auer, *The Church: The Universal Sacrament of Salvation*, ed. Hugh M. Riley, Johann Auer, and Joseph Ratzinger, trans. Michael Waldstein, vol. 8, Dogmatic Theology (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 98.

<sup>12</sup> Mark 16:15

<sup>13</sup> Acts 1:8

<sup>14</sup> Pope John Paul II. *Redemptoris Missio*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990. <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hfjp-iienc07121990redemptoris-missio.html>.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>17</sup> John Paul II, *Audiences of Pope John Paul II (English)* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Pope John Paul II. *Homily at Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979. <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hfjp-iihom19790524seminari-ingl-roma.html>.

*Saviour, Jesus Christ. Be imbued with the hope that is so much a part of the mystery of the Ascension of Jesus. Be deeply conscious of Christ's victory and triumph over sin and death. Realize that the strength of Christ is greater than our weakness, greater than the weakness of the whole world. Try to understand and share the joy that Mary experienced in knowing that her Son had taken his place with his Father, whom he loved infinitely. Renew your faith today in the promise of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has gone to prepare a place for us, so that he can come back again and take us to himself."*<sup>19</sup>

"The Second Vatican Council has helped us to realize that 'mission' is the Church's true name and in some way its definition. The Church becomes itself when it fulfills its mission".<sup>20</sup> Today's solemnity is for us a great celebration and a missionary moment reminding us that our identity in Christ is intrinsically missionary.<sup>21</sup> Each of us must know which part of the mission field we are in at any given moment. For most of us and for most of the day, we'll find ourselves at work or at school. Let's consider our work for a moment, in the light of mission. Since work in its subjective aspect is always a personal action, it follows that the whole person, body and spirit, participates in it, whether it is manual or intellectual work. It is also to the whole person that the word of the living God is directed, the evangelical message of salvation, in which we find many points which concern human work and which throw particular light on it.<sup>22</sup>

These points need to be properly assimilated: an inner effort on the part of the human spirit, guided by faith, hope and charity, is needed in order that through these points the work of the individual human being may be given the meaning which it has in the eyes of God and by means of which work enters into the salvation process on a par with the other ordinary yet particularly important components of its texture. The Church considers it her duty to speak out on work from the viewpoint of its human value and of the moral order to which it belongs, and she sees this as one of her important tasks within the service that she renders to the evangelical message as a whole. At the same time she sees it as her particular duty to form a spirituality of work which will help all people to come closer, through work, to God, the Creator and Redeemer, to participate in his salvific plan for man and the world and to deepen their friendship with Christ in their lives by accepting, through faith, a living participation in his threefold mission as Priest, Prophet and King, as the Second Vatican Council so eloquently teaches.<sup>23</sup>

Understanding our identity in Christ is essential to our mission activity, which is understood as evangelization, which is integrated and ecclesial. This includes preaching, catechesis, the sacraments, and witness through lived life. The Church's life-birth becomes concrete as sacramental incorporation and apostolic teaching—so the Church "arrives" historically wherever evangelization builds a real community, is engaged in the building of the Kingdom of God on earth. Our mission requires proper spiritual, theological, and practical formation (including language and culture), unity and humility in missionary work, and coordinated effort that respects local autonomy and encourages cooperation. It is an ongoing institutional and pastoral embodiment of the Gospel adapted to peoples and cultures, without losing apostolic unity. The Church's missionary advent is the Spirit-driven continuation of the apostolic mission that flows from Christ's saving work unfolding visibly as evangelization throughout the world.<sup>24</sup>

***For the sake of the salvation of the world; embrace fully your missionary identity.***

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<sup>19</sup> John Paul II, *Audiences of Pope John Paul II (English)* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Pope John Paul II, Epiphany 1979

<sup>21</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992. § 868. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM).

<sup>22</sup> Vatican Council II. *Ad Gentes*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/histcouncils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207ad-gentes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/histcouncils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207ad-gentes_en.html).

<sup>23</sup> Pope John Paul II. *Laborem Exercens*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981. <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hfjp-iienc14091981laborem-exercens.html>. #24

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_ad-gentes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html)

## Main Points

This section distills the document into its central theological and pastoral claims about the Ascension of Christ, the identity of the Church, and the missionary calling of believers.

- **The Ascension is a decisive event in salvation history:** It is not a symbolic farewell but is the real exaltation of the risen Christ, who enters the Father's glory and brings his earthly mission to fulfillment.
- **Christ continues to reign and intercede:** Ascension means Christ is enthroned at the right hand of the Father, where he exercises authority and continues his priestly intercession for humanity.
- **The Ascension gives believers hope:** Since Christ the head has gone before the members of his Body into heavenly glory, Christians are called to live with confidence, hope, and an eternal perspective.
- **The apostles are told to wait for the Holy Spirit:** Their mission does not begin through human effort alone, but through divine empowerment, showing that the Church's witness depends on the Spirit's power.
- **The Ascension and Pentecost belong together:** Ascension prepares for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, making it a crucial link between Christ's saving work and the visible emergence of the Church.
- **The Church is rooted in Christ and animated by the Spirit:** The Church's "birth" is grounded in Christ's redemptive work, while its historical "advent" and public mission are sustained by the Holy Spirit.
- **The Church is missionary by nature:** Because Christ sends the apostles to all nations, the Church is described as universally ordered toward evangelization rather than self-preservation.
- **Christian mission includes proclamation, sacrament, and witness:** Evangelization is broader than preaching alone; it includes teaching, baptism, sacramental life, and faithful daily witness.
- **Mission applies to ordinary life:** The Church's mission extends into work, school, and daily responsibilities, where ordinary labor can participate in God's saving plan when lived in faith.
- **Called to embrace our missionary identity:** Recognize who you are in Christ and live boldly as participants in the Church's mission for the salvation of the world.

## Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
<b>Advent of the Church</b>	The historical emergence and public mission of the Church as it begins to act as a community sent to the world, sustained by the Holy Spirit.
<b>Ascension</b>	The decisive event in salvation history where the risen Christ is exalted into heaven, entering the Father's glory and bringing his earthly mission to fulfillment.
<b>Birth of the Church</b>	The origin of the Church rooted in Christ's redemptive work, specifically symbolized by the blood and water flowing from his side.

<b>Evangelization</b>	A broad mission following Christ's instructions that includes teaching, baptizing, sacramental life, and providing a faithful daily witness.
<b>Lynchpin</b>	A term used to describe the Ascension as the essential connection that completes the birth of the Church and prepares for the outpouring of the Spirit.
<b>Mystical Body of Christ</b>	A theological description of the Church where Christ is the head and the baptized are the members, sharing in his life and mission.
<b>Paschal Mystery</b>	The overarching mystery of Christ's suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension into glory.
<b>Pentecost</b>	The event marking the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, making the Church's life and mission visibly operative in history.
<b>Priestly Intercession</b>	The ongoing work of the ascended Christ at the right hand of the Father, where he lives to mediate on behalf of humanity.
<b>Universal Sacrament of Salvation</b>	The identity of the Church as a visible sign and instrument through which the Holy Spirit communicates God's grace and salvation to the entire world.