

## The Ascension of the Lord

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### *Readings*

Acts 1:1-11

Ps 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9

Eph 1:17-23

Matthew 28:16-20

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The gospel of Matthew is a sacred narrative of beginnings and ends. It takes us from the historic lineage of Jesus' ancestry to this brief conclusion that unfolds the mystery of the Ascension of the Lord. The memorial marks the end of a mission which Jesus carried out in obedience to the Father to bring humanity out of darkness and into the kingdom of light (Phil 2:6-8). It is an accomplishment that we celebrate in this liturgy that touches the depths of the human condition and heights of divine purpose. Jesus calls his disciples to the mountain, the frequent site of prayer and revelations, for an encounter that will define his legacy for his followers in a personal and universal dimension. They have been privileged witnesses who lived in close company with Him (Act 10:41), an experience that changed their lives. They have received his message, believed in Him, and kept his word (Jn 17:6-12). And in the same manner that, at the end of his journey, the Lord declared that his time had arrived, another beat of time had now arrived for the disciples as well.

Today, at the proclamation of the sacred narrative, we stand with utmost reverence, just like the disciples who "worshiped, but...doubted." There are always clouds in our faith. But Jesus offers reassurance, saying: "*All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*" He is the Lord and Master and will entrust them with the continuation of his mission in the world: "Go,

*therefore, and make disciples of all nations”* (Mt 28:19). The One who was sent is now sending his disciples off into the world where they remain but to which they do not belong (Jn 15:19). The Lord sends them out with powerful words – “*Go, baptize, teach*” – that convey the redemptive message of the Gospel. And here we are, not as spectators but witnesses who also receive this command.

The Ascension of the Lord signals the beginning of a new evangelization that requires committed disciples for a task so urgent in our time. The disciples will encounter a world of immense complexity and contrasts which have become ever more overwhelming. On the one hand we observe the resilience among many people of the inner “holy restlessness”<sup>1</sup> towards transcendence that manifest in new forms of religious, personal, and communal expressions. It coexists with another dark side of widespread atheism in its many shades. In the absence of God there is an emptiness that dries up the soul of humanity. From there derive wars, oppression, and disruptions that constitute our global malaise. The Master warned, “*Indeed, I send you like sheep among the wolves*” (Mt 10:16-23 )...*the world will hate you...*” (Jn 15:18-25). There will be a hard going throughout the journey and believers across time will have the experience of defeat and powerlessness. The parable of weeds among a farmer’s wheat looms large over this event in the mountain (Mt 13:24-30).

But the voice of the Lord sounds firm and clear sending us there. And as the Gospel is proclaimed here today, all of us are called to reflect on the narrative and act upon it with our good will and limitations. We are pressed to apply an exercise of inquiry and engagement, the human dynamic of faith: “How does this particular Gospel text reveal God’s plan of which I am

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<sup>1</sup>This expression of Pope Leo XIV reflects the deep meaning of Augustine’s sentence “our hearts are restless” in *Confessions* I,1,1.

a part?” If anyone ever wondered what the purpose might be for life as a disciple, listen to the Lord with “the ear of the heart”<sup>2</sup> sending you into the world, and decide how to respond.

Fearful people will hold back, with gestures of indifference, burying their talents (Mt 25:14-30) or giving excuses for their lack of involvement like the guests who never came to the banquet (Mt 22:11-14). Others will take the word of the One “who descends and now ascends” to their hearts as they search for the meaning and purpose in their lives. Those will experience the grace of Christ through their participation in God’s plan for humanity. As Paul described in his letter to the Ephesians “*Christ gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ*” (4:11-13).

The Lord’s sendoff of his followers transforms all Christians into pilgrims of the gospel. When St. Augustine refers to a “life of pilgrimage” and thinks of himself as “a pilgrim soul” he expresses the ultimate awareness of discipleship.<sup>3</sup> From his conversion and testimony of life we learn that a pilgrim is foremost one who recognizes the restlessness of the heart in the dreams, challenges, passions and failures that shape the story of our lives, and who orients that experience towards God.

The true pilgrim is in the world and goes through its venues but does not surrender to the ambitions and idolatries of the world. He exercises discernment upon the reality of life refusing to conform with the illusions, false truths, and seductions of worldly life (Rom 13:13-14).<sup>4</sup> And above all, is moved by the Spirit, with firm convictions and courage to proclaim the Gospel

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<sup>2</sup>*Confessions* I, 5,5.

<sup>3</sup>[augustineconfessionsproject.org](http://augustineconfessionsproject.org)> Exercise 7, Pilgrimage.

<sup>4</sup>The stark injunction that woke up the mind and heart of Augustine to conversion in *Confessions* VIII,12,29.

message in such a way that creates confidence and hope affecting others to imitation.<sup>5</sup> A pilgrim also endures the impact of the powers that antagonize the Christian message. St. Paul says: “*We are hard pressed on every side but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed.*”<sup>6</sup> And greets others with a sign of peace, which is a gracious gift from Christ to the world. It is not utopia but a conviction which makes possible the experience of universal fraternity. The world continues to confront the Gospel in our time, and we should look up to the exemplary courage of Pope Leo XIV standing for its ethical and moral values against the forces of evil that seek destruction and domination.<sup>7</sup>

As the liturgy proclaims that Christ ascends to the Father and we are sent to the world, Augustine encourages us:

Run everywhere, for you are the light of the world,  
and your place is not under a basket.  
He to whom you have given yourselves is exalted,  
and now he has exalted you.  
Run, then, and make him known to all nations.<sup>8</sup>

We shall go ahead without fear remembering the Lord’s words in today’s Gospel: “*I am with you always, until the end of the age.*” (Mt 28:20). It is the lasting promise of the new and eternal covenant, and we celebrate that presence joyfully in this sacrament of unity and faith, the Eucharist, in remembrance of Him.

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<sup>5</sup>The power of narrative is at the heart of the Gospel message as Augustine testifies in *Confessions* VIII,4,9.

<sup>6</sup>2 Corinthians 4: 8-9.

<sup>7</sup>Pope Leo XIV shows the way in his powerful address “Urbi et Orbi” on Easter Day (5 April 2026) and in his homily on the Vigil for Peace ,11 April 2026. Vatican.va.

<sup>8</sup>*Confessions* XIII, 18,25.