

GOSPEL

LUKE 24:46-53

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this.

'And now I am sending down to you what the Father has promised. Stay in the city then, until you are clothed with the power from on high.' Then he took them out as far as the outskirts of Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. Now as he blessed them, he withdrew from them and was carried up heaven. They worshipped him and then went back to Jerusalem full of joy; and they were continually in the Temple praising God.

The Gospel of the Lord.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today we are celebrating the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven, which occurred 40 days after Easter. Let us contemplate the mystery of Jesus who leaves our earthly space to enter the fullness of the glory of God, taking our humanity with him. In other words, our humanity enters heaven for the first time.

The Gospel of Luke describes the reaction of the disciples before the Lord who "parted from them and was carried up into heaven". They had no sorrow nor dismay, but "they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy". It was the return of those who no longer feared the city that had rejected the Master, who had seen Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial; who had seen the dispersion of the disciples and the brutality of a power that felt threatened. Since that day, the Apostles and every disciple of Christ have been able to live in Jerusalem and in all cities of the world, even in those most afflicted by injustice and violence, because above every city there is the same heaven and every inhabitant can lift his or her gaze with hope. Jesus, God, is true man, with his

human body, he is in heaven! This is our hope, it is still ours, and we are firm in this hope if we look to heaven.

In this heaven lives that God who revealed himself so closely as to take on the face of a man, Jesus of Nazareth. He remains for us always the God-with-us — let us remember this: Emmanuel, God with us — and he never leaves us alone! We can look to heaven in order to recognize our future before us. In the Ascension of Jesus, Crucified and Risen, there is the promise of our participation in the fullness of life with God.

Before departing from his friends, Jesus, referring to the event of his death and Resurrection, said to them: "You are witnesses of these things". In other words the disciples, the Apostles, were witnesses of the death and Resurrection of Christ, on that day, also of the Ascension of Christ. In fact, after seeing their Lord ascend into heaven, the disciples returned to the city as witnesses joyfully proclaiming to all the new life which comes from the Crucified and Risen One, in whose name "repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached to all nations". This is the witness — born not only with words but with everyday life — the witness that every Sunday should flow from our churches so as to enter during the week into homes, offices, schools, meeting and recreational places, hospitals, prisons, homes for the elderly, in places crowded with immigrants, in the peripheries of the city... We must bear this witness every week: Christ is with us: Jesus rose to heaven, he is with us: Christ lives!

Jesus assured us that in this proclamation and in this witness we shall be "clothed with power from on high", that is, with the power of the Holy Spirit. Here is the secret to this mission: the presence among us of the Risen Lord, who with the gift of the Holy Spirit, continues to open our minds and our hearts, to proclaim his love and his mercy even in the most resistant areas of our cities. The Holy Spirit is the true artisan of the multiform witness that the Church and every baptized person renders in the world. Therefore, we must never neglect to meditate in prayer in

order to praise God and invoke the gift of the Holy Spirit. This week, which leads us to the Feast of Pentecost, let us remain spiritually in the Upper Room, together with the Virgin Mary, to receive the Holy Spirit.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Repentance is our first move, so God can pour out his mercy and forgiveness. How do you go about examining who you are and what you do, so that God can continually transform you?
- We are called to be witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus and the Father has promised the Holy Spirit to those who follow Jesus. Have you claimed, and how might you call on the gifts of the Holy Spirit in your daily life as his disciple and witness?
- Is your worship full of praise and joy? What might you be able to do in your thinking and praying in order to have a heart that is full of praise and joy even amidst all life's difficulties?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.